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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TEACHERS' STORIES AND PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS

by

JUNE AILEEN McCONAGHY

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Edmonton, Alberta

FALL, 1991

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled TEACHERS' STORIES AND PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS submitted by JUNE AILEEN McCONAGHY in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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Date: September 6, 1991

DEDICATION

To my mother, Lilian I. Allen, in loving memory of her life and her devotion to her family and to others.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the nature of teachers' conversational storytelling experiences as a means of providing the teachers with further insights into their own pedagogy. It is an investigation into the nature and function of narrative as a mode of thinking and as a valid way of creating meaning out of experience. It concerns teachers' professional development, through the construction and sharing of stories of everyday life in classrooms.

The study was carried out over a period of one school year with a group of six teacher researchers who met regularly in my home. The interactive and social setting of a home was an important contextual factor in enabling the teachers to develop a meaningful and collaborative relationship. The teacher participants were from six different schools within the same school district. They were all primary teachers of young children age five to eight. The teachers had identified themselves as teacher researchers who wanted to engage in a form of professional development that involved learning collaboratively with other teachers, choice in what they researched, and learning that was directly tied to the children they taught.

The mode of research in this study is narrative inquiry based on the dialogic nature and the individual meanings of teachers' stories of experience. This study is descriptive and interpretive and it is theoretically rooted in the context of human science.

The stories the teachers told, listened to and discussed were narrative accounts of events and incidents going on everyday in their classrooms. They

were based on happenings that caught the teachers' attention, happenings that they noted as holding some significance for their own teaching and learning.

Through the retelling of these incidents in conversational story form, the response to each others' stories and the reflective journal writing, the teachers became more critically aware of their assumptions, especially in relationship to their practice. They discovered a clearer understanding of themselves and of new or alternative possibilities for ways of acting pedagogically with children. In this sense, the teachers' stories acted not only as a means of providing pedagogical insights but as a transformative experience in their teaching lives.

This study, centred on the subject of story and narrative, brings together two major concerns. First, the need for a better understanding of narrative as a process of meaning making for teachers and children in schools. And second, the need for an alternative supplement to the existing approach to teachers' professional development, especially in the area of reflective teaching. I offer this study as a missing piece in the mosaic of teachers' preservice and inservice education.

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CHAPTER 1

A CALL TO STORIES

When I go to inservices I usually come away thinking about all the things I should be doing that I'm not doing. I feel that everyone around me is already doing all these things. The whole experience often makes me feel alone and inadequate as a teacher.

A beginning teacher, 1989

We have come to the end of an era. Staff development as we have known it has proven ineffective and limiting. To usher in a new era, we need a new vision of staff development—one that challenges and involves teachers in the honoring and creation of their own knowledge.

Lambert, 1989, p.78.

The educator/researcher as story teller is a metaphor for engagement, a call to action. ...Stories are where we must begin — and stories are the clues which will lead us to new ways of knowing.

Polakow, 1985, p.829.

> There is a little boy, Gordon, in my year one class who is beginning to take a lot more risks in reading and writing. I give the class choices of things to do when they finish something. Today, Gordon said he would like to write. I have several shape books for children to use for writing and he said he wanted to do something about bears. We talked about what he knew about bears and what he could do on each page. He could print the words "I" and "like". When he had finished he read his writing to me. Page one, I like bears, page two, I like bears very much, page three, I like bears very very much, page four, I like bears very very very much and on and on. I thought he was confident in taking risks in writing, but there seemed to be limits on what he would try to do. When I discussed this incident with my principal, she suggested that perhaps he was aware of the audience and the expectation of the audience was to create lots of volume.

Helen, who told the above story is one of a group of six teacher researchers who met with me every two to three weeks over a period of a year to engage in conversational storytelling experiences of classroom life. The stories the teachers exchanged began with their observations of everyday happenings in their teaching, in children's learning, and in the ordinary day-to-day events going on at school. Through the telling and the discussion of these incidents, the teachers' stories provided them with further insights into their own pedagogy. Helen's story involves an incident surrounding a year one student's emergent writing. Ashley, another teacher who was listening to the story, responded by saying, "That

reminds me of something that happened in my classroom." She told the following story about a little boy in her kindergarten class.

> Today, Michael wrote in his own little book. On the first page he wrote "I went to the mountain", the next page, "I went further," and he continued on the next few pages with the words, "further" and "further". Obviously a pattern of some kind is important to him but I have been reading articles which suggest that patterned writing is not a good thing to do with kids. Yet they seem to need this. Maybe he is writing patterns because we have been reading a lot of patterned books like that. A lot of patterning seems to be coming up in their writing.

Dialogue among the group ensued from these two stories. Paige, for example, offered the comment that, "Children repeat things right from birth. They like repetition and this might be a way of their getting control of the writing." Carol suggested, "It might be a compromise between knowing their audience and their ability to handle print." Katie recalled a similar incident with a child whose writing she initially thought was "just scribble" but as she looked at it more closely she realized there was much more going on in this writing than she had once thought. Katie also suggested it might be interesting if Ashley could go back to Michael and see what images he might have had in his head when he wrote these words on the page. Then Paige remembered a grade one student's storywriting which contained only the main idea; the details were missing. When she asked him about the events in his story he not only filled in the missing parts but offered a detailed account of what was going to happen next.

The above conversation is only a small part of the discussion that occurred as a result of the teachers' storytelling. Here, as the teachers interpreted and responded to each others stories of young children's attempts as beginning writers, they were recalling similar experiences with other children. In doing so, they are using the power of narrative in story form and in conversation to give shape and meaning to their ideas and to the events they are narrating. They are searching for the meaning that undergirds the actions of their students not only to try to understand what these children are attempting to do, but to get a sense of what they, as teachers, need to do in order to help children to learn. As storytellers and listeners they are creating meaning not only from their own narratives but from the narratives told by others. They are showing us how "the real author of the narrative is not only he who tells it, but also at times even more he who hears it" (Genette, 1980).

The same teachers kept journals in which they recorded some of the incidents they observed in their classrooms. They used the journals to write reflectively in narrative form about the meaning and possibilities these and other incidents might have for their day-to-day practices. Helen, for example, reflecting in her journal on the story of Gordon's experience in writing about bears, wrote: "Thinking about this incident makes me wonder about topics young children choose for writing and who should decide on what kids write about ... perhaps I need to create a better balance between student choice and teacher direction ... this also makes me more aware of how children develop a sense of audience."

As the teacher participants in this study recorded and framed these incidents into a narrative story form through writing, through telling and

retelling the stories to each other, they were eagerly engaging in a meaningful form of professional development. They were gathering and moulding pedagogical insights — insights which would not likely occur if they did not have the opportunity to tell their stories and to hear the stories of other teachers.

Teachers and Storytelling

To find teachers engaged in conversational shoptalk or telling stories to each other about everyday occurrences in their classrooms is not unusual. Teachers regularly tell story incidents to each other. They spontaneously exchange stories in staffrooms, in each others' classrooms after school and at social gatherings. Stories surround us everywhere. They are a basic form we use to communicate with each other about the things going on in our lifeworlds as teachers (Bauman, 1986; Rosen, 1985; Rosenbluth, 1986).

More often than not, however, teachers telling stories in casual situations acts as an effective and necessary sounding board to vent frustrations and anxieties frequently centred on students or parents and administrators. Usually stories of this nature involve puzzling or worrisome situations that teachers want to share or confirm with each other. Then, too, there are those narrative accounts of humorous incidents which are not only entertaining but can provide an important and welcome relief to what might otherwise be a seriously stressful moment in a school day.

There are many other kinds of stories, some of which, unfortunately, are seldom recorded and some that are never told. For example, teachers are often very hesitant to share episodes that focus on those joyful or satisfying moments in the classroom when the worthwhileness of teaching and being with children is keenly felt. Many teachers are fearful of being viewed as egotistical or self indulgent if they tell their colleagues too many success stories too often. Yet, stories told by a practicing teacher about things that are going well, or not so well, in the classroom, and especially those stories that led to new awareness and new possibilities, are among the most valuable resources educators have for furthering our understanding of teaching and learning. Harold Rosen (1988a) comments on those numerous and untold stories. "It would be true to say that there is a huge reservoir of innovatory teaching experience which is never drawn on because it is never translated into stories" (p. 172).

But even when this reservoir is drawn on and when teachers' experiences are translated into stories we need to ask the questions, "Who should select the events, the characters, the actions and narratively shape these elements into storyform?" And "Whose voice should be heard in the telling of these stories?" In human science and social science research, informants' narratives serve as a rich source for qualitative data — for insights into the lifeworlds of others. In these situations, however, usually the shaping and the telling of the stories is more of a creation of the researcher than the informant. While there is always a certain amount of learning going on in any act of narrating, the learning that is created in most research situations rest more strongly with the researchers themselves. Although stories of teaching have for a long time served as a

data source for us to learn more about education and classroom realities, rarely have these stories served as a fundamental means for the teachers to discover meaning for themselves.

But to recognize teachers' stories as a valid means of knowing and communicating for the teachers is not enough. We need to capture these classroom experiences, to engage in conversation about them, to challenge and to question our actions as a way of taking responsibility for our own learning — our own professional development. These things, of course, can only be possible if teachers have the desire and the opportunity to come together as teacher learners at a time apart from the brief staffroom or hallway encounters which usually serve as a place where teachers chat and exchange their stories.

This study shows how opportunities can be created for teachers to deliberately come together to learn professionally. It describes how the atmosphere that is created for these get-togethers influences the openness and the willingness of teachers to tell their stories and to engage in meaningful conversation. Through their own narratives they show us how they are taking an important step toward new possibilities for collaborative involvement in their own professional development. They show us how they are engaging in a way of learning that in Lambert's words "challenges and involves teachers in the honoring and creation of their own knowledge" (1989, p. 78).

INSERVICE EDUCATION

One of the greater areas of growth in teacher education during the past two decades has been inservice education for practicing teachers. When school districts consider and plan for subject area inservicing they frequently bring in "experts" to acquaint staff with the latest information about teaching strategies or new materials along with current trends in education. They seldom involve the teachers themselves in the planning or implementing of these inservices. Even when individual schools plan their own staff development (professional development days), the teachers within the school are not usually involved beyond the level of making arrangements to obtain the services of an outside "expert" (consultant or university teacher educator). Hence, inservicing as teacher education for practicing teachers tends to become the "in thing", the quick solution to turn ineffective into effective teaching. The results are often seen in more short term cosmetic changes in the classroom (materials, activities, techniques) rather than in long term and lasting changes in the teachers' pedagogical understanding of subject matter, of children and learning, or of themselves and their role as teacher.

The reality of conventional inservices minimizes the importance, not only of learners using their own language for learning, but minimizes the importance of qualities such as camaraderie, social relationships, interaction and personal involvement in subjects to be learned. For a number of reasons these qualities are either dealt with in a very superficial manner or ignored altogether.

The Traditional Inservice Model

Michael Fullan (1982) agrees that the planning that revolves around most inservice sessions is seldom connected to any specific plan which involves teachers. He says these type of inservices are "adhoc, discontinuous, and unconnected to any plan for change ... [they] ignore the realities of everyday work of teachers and administrators" (p. 9). The outcome of so many traditional types of inservices seldom leads to any kind of reflective or critical thinking on the part of teachers and so we seldom see any meaningful change in a teacher's practice when they return to the classroom.

Paulo Freire (1985) recognizes the limitations of large impersonal inservice models for teachers' individual professional development. He cautions us about what often happens when teachers do not take time to think critically about what they have heard or read before rushing back to their classrooms to teach children. He suggests that teachers can transform all they have learned into a formula and then attempt to transmit this formulated knowledge into the heads of students. Or they will become so frustrated at trying to directly adopt rather than adapt new ideas that they will lose confidence in what they have heard and simply return to the old, more traditional ways of teaching.

New Possibilities for Inservice

To recognize the limitations of current forms of inservice education is, of course, not to suggest doing away with this model. Clearly, we still

need a vehicle to transmit information, to provide help in curriculum implementation, to offer activities and innovative teaching strategies and techniques. What I am suggesting, however, is that the practice of inservice education which emerges from the dominant model is not conducive in its present form to leading teachers toward any kind of meaningful reflection or thinking about their teaching in a pedagogical way. The very nature of most school districts' model of inservice sessions discourages rather than encourages teachers to think critically, to question or to express their ideas honestly and openly. In this kind of setting there is very little opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue, to make friendships or to develop a sense of community. All of these things are very necessary for learning.

On the other hand, when the teachers in this study came together as a small group of teacher learners their experience was vastly different. They brought stories from their own classroom experiences. The topics for discussion were defined by the teachers themselves rather than by the "presenter experts" they were accustomed to meeting at inservices. The purpose for coming together was not to transmit information, but to promote reflection and dialogue — to engage in conversational storytelling as a fundamental means of creating meaning of learning and teaching and being with children. Here, teachers were encouraged to reflect on their practice as a way of discovering their own assumptions.

Another major difference is seen in the role of the consultant as group leader. Rather than that of presenter, the consultant acted as participant in the telling and listening to stories. As researcher participant in this situation, I was a facilitator and enabler of teachers' learning. I

was an insider rather than an outsider in my role as group leader. In this approach to professional development, the emphasis is on encouraging teachers to go beyond the aspects of teaching that focus on collecting new activities or techniques to use on that well known Monday. It is deliberately designed with a view which reflects the belief that learning is interpretive, rather than transmittable; that it is personal and social, rather than abstract and technological.

This study presents what might be called the missing piece in the mosaic of inservice teacher education. It is not a replacement for the existing inservice framework we now use, rather, it is offered as a supplement, an alternative way of filling the gap that teachers themselves have recognized and requested as an essential and missing quality in their own professional development.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to explore teachers' narrative experiences, that is, the telling and the listening to stories of classroom life as a way of creating meaning and acquiring educational and pedagogical insights. The term "pedagogy" is defined in both **Webster's Collegiate Dictionary** and in **The Oxford English Dictionary** as "the art, science, or the profession of teaching", and "the work or occupation of teaching."

While, in this study, I will use the term "pedagogy" to mean the occupation of teaching, I also wish to extend the meaning of "pedagogy" to include certain qualities which are embedded within the realm of human science and are presented in humanistic, phenomenological and

hermeneutic approaches to research. These qualities revolve around practical but sometimes complex and multifaceted notions such as thoughtfulness, caring, sensitivity, trust and a strong sense of responsibility to try to follow what is morally right and appropriate for children and for the adults we encounter in our lives.

In an attempt to understand and to use the term "pedagogy" in this broader sense, I have drawn on the ideas and work of people who are, in different ways, committed to an understanding of pedagogy that goes beyond the usual teaching and learning process. Some of these people include Ton Beekman (1983), Otto Bollnow (1989), Robert Coles (1967-77), Paulo Freire (1985), Maxine Greene (1986), Gareth Matthews (1984), Valerie Polakow (1985) and Max van Manen (1991).

The focus in this study is also on teacher change; how new understandings and new ways of seeing our own pedagogy can serve as a transformative experience and as a call to action. The nature of this approach to teachers' learning is personal and interpretive. It is based on the teachers' own narrative accounts of classroom incidents taken from their day-to-day lives. The role of language as narrative discourse in the storytelling, in the dialogue among the teachers and in the writing, is central to the meaning-making function of the study.

The major research question that guided this study is as follows:

How do teachers' stories provide pedagogical insights?

Other questions included the following:

- What are the stories teachers tell to each other?
- What makes a particular incident "story-worthy" in the eyes of the teacher?
- What is the effect of the social context in which teachers' stories are told?
- What is the role of language, especially narrative, in the teachers' creation of meaning of classroom incidents?
- What does the narrator learn in the act of telling?
- What are the pedagogical insights that led the teachers toward some form of change in praxis?

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The educational reform movement which was launched with great fanfare in 1983 with the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, **A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,** carried with it very high expectations for finding the long sought solutions to the numerous and complex problems in schools. While the initiative it demonstrated in examining issues concerning schools was an important step toward change, the approach to reform taken at the time omitted almost entirely the role of the teacher. It failed to involve teachers in any way in the decision-making which affected their day-to-day teaching (Bacharach, 1990; Boyer, 1988; Sarason, 1990).

It wasn't until three years later that the educational reform movement, with the report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the

Economy, **A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century** (1986), placed a much stronger emphasis on the teacher, especially in terms of examining their long term goals of professional development. Since then, researchers in teacher education have looked far more critically at not only the total picture of reform, but at the continuum along which teachers travel in their personal and professional growth. As a result, we are now far more aware of some of the needs and problems involved in creating opportunities for teachers to become active participants in their own learning — in their own professional development.

We recognize professional teachers as those who are concerned with continual lifelong learning. For those teachers, learning does not stop at graduation from a university or after a series of workshops or inservices put on by a school district. Learning and teaching for professional teachers become inseparable and as long as they are engaged as teachers they will continue to learn — to strive toward pedagogical excellence, which is to strive toward bringing about what is "good" for children.

Teachers as Agents and Critics

It seems that professional teachers who care strongly for children, who feel confident in their own knowledge and yet remain open to new ideas, new insights and new learning, also feel freed from rigid control imposed by a bureaucratic school system. They have, in their own way and in their own time, come to terms with what Valerie Polakow (1985) has called their "paradoxical role of teacher as both agent and critic of an educational system" (p. 830). They have learned how to work responsibly

within a school system, to distinguish the real constraints imposed on them from the constraints that are perceived as real and they have learned how to act accordingly. In other words, they have discovered how not to allow the institutional structure to interfere with their pedagogical commitment.

If important change in schools is to take place, teachers also need to be empowered and encouraged by their school districts to think critically, to re-examine their beliefs in relation to their actions and to assume responsibility for decision-making which affects their classroom teaching and the children they teach. Growth implies change and because sincere and worthwhile change is often personally difficult, we all have a tendency, at every level, to avoid it. Yet as Fullan (1982) points out, "Most changes worth their salt involve some significant alternations in what teachers do and think" (p.118). Most importantly, he adds that, "The lack of opportunity for teachers to reflect, interact with others, share, learn, develop on the job makes it unlikely that significant changes will occur" (p. 118).

Recommendations for Change

A Nation Prepared (1986) supports the concept of enabling teachers to enhance their own professionalism as revealed in the following quotations:

> Teachers must think for themselves if they are to help others think for themselves (p. 25).
>
> Properly staffed schools can only succeed if they operate on the principle that the essential resource is already inside the school: determined, intelligent and capable teachers (p. 58).

> Fundamental to our conception of a workable professional environment that fosters learning is more time for all professional teachers to reflect, plan and discuss teaching innovations and problems with their colleagues (p. 60).

The reform movement in the United States has made Canadian educators think far more seriously about the need for teacher education reform in this country.

In the past four years, two important Canadian studies recommending far reaching changes in teacher education which emphasize the teacher as life long learner have been carried out in Ontario and Alberta.

Teacher Education in Ontario (1987), by Fullan and Connelly, suggests that the most important target for teacher education reform is the schools themselves. This report points out, "The starting point for reforming teacher education should be plans and proposals which change the school from a bureaucratic workplace into one of professionals" (p. 44). "Schools", they contend, "do not, in general, encourage creative, professionally autonomous action on the part of their teachers" (p. 53).

Seymour Sarason (1990) also believes that a majority of teachers feel they do not have any meaningful role in the decisions surrounding their work. But he cautions us that "Any advocate for teacher participation in decision making has to be extraordinarily clear about the consequences they envisage if the proposal is implemented" (p. 62). It would be wrong, Sarason asserts, if such a proposal for teachers' involvement in decision making is introduced for such reasons as improving educational scores or

decreasing school dropouts. Sarason justifies teacher participation as "political-moral in that it rests on the value that those who are vitally affected by decisions should stand in some meaningful relation to the decision-making process" (p. 63). He is concerned too with the imbalance of power at the school level when he says, "Unless altering power relationships among different levels of educational personnel is concomitant with altering power relationships in the classroom, the goals of reform will not be realized" (p. xii).

The imbalance of power relations between teacher and students in the classroom must also be altered if learning is to be affected and overall educational reform is to occur. Paradoxically, some teachers often wish for more freedom and power for themselves but are hesitant to give students a voice and control in their learning.

My experience however, has shown me that the teachers who are reflective and are willing to examine their beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning are usually the teachers who want to continue to grow in their pedagogical understanding and to improve their professional knowledge. They are usually the ones who also struggle the hardest to know what is beneficial and appropriate to do with the children they teach.

Exploring and Mapping the Future: A Focus on Priority Issues (1989) produced by the University of Alberta advocates teacher education as a life long process. The report proposes a model for teacher education based upon reflection-in-action. This very closely parallels Fullan and Connelly's recommendation for teacher education. The reflection-in-action model suggests that "knowledge would not be separated from the knower in a critically reflective approach" (p. 30). It also suggests, "Teachers gain a

theoretical understanding of practice as they engage in teaching and reflect upon it during and after its occurrence ... such an approach has the potential to make the school the centre of inquiry and to have teachers view themselves as researchers" (p. 31).

The image of the teacher in which the Ontario and Alberta studies base their education continuum is very similar. Fullan and Connelly (1987) base specific recommendations for teacher as learner on the following image of the teacher:

> We need teachers who are reflective, critical and inquiring. We need teachers who are comfortable with problems and for whom genuine discussion and inquiry with students is valued. ... We need teachers for whom the science and technology of teaching is continually developing and for whom the job is fundamentally an art which they study, reflect on, and refine throughout their careers (p. 50).

To bring about this ideal of a professional teacher, administrators and teacher educators must involve teachers in the process. As Fullan and Connelly state we need to harness teachers' natural abilities. "We need to tap their knowledge, unleash their imaginations and then give them responsibility that is, after all, inherent in any profession worthy of calling itself such" (1987, p. 53).

Ernest Boyer (1988), president of the Carnegie Foundation for Teaching, makes the same important point as Fullan and Connelly when he says that in matters of school reforms teachers have largely been

ignored. "Teachers have remained dispirited, confronted with working conditions that have left them more responsible but less empowered" (p. 7). Boyer is referring to the added tasks and responsibilities teachers are expected to carry out in areas such as assessment, testing and curriculum implementation without having participated in the planning surrounding them. It is the need to recognize the teachers' expertise and to allow their voices to be heard in decision-making and planning, that is now occupying the attention of educators concerned with change and reform. As Goodlad (1990) noted, "The two strands of educational reform beginning to be joined by the end of the 1980's were coming together around a concept of schools as centers of change and principals and teachers as those empowered to renew them" (p. 51).

Schools as Centres for Change

Schools developing their own teacher centres is one way of creating centres of change. Fullan and Connelly (1987) in their study of teacher education recommended that each school develop a Teacher Centre. Such a Centre would be a place where growth and development occurs and "on-the-job reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are key phrases which focus on the day-to-day forces most powerful in inservice education of all professionals, not only teachers" (p. 61).

A school-within-a school advocated by Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, is another idea for schools becoming a centre for change. Shanker (1989) suggests that teachers must take the initiative to improve their own professional development. He puts forth the

idea that whenever six or more teachers can find a considered and creative direction to pursue in their teaching they ought to develop the concept, seek the support of the principal, commit themselves to change, work out the details and create a school-within-a school.

Where school districts are not providing meaningful professional opportunities for teachers and where they see, in Pinar's (1977) words, "the teacher as someone who is free to move around the garden but unable to go beyond the gate", it becomes incumbant on teachers to seek out opportunities for their own professional growth.

Many teachers are being creative and are having great success in their classrooms, and students and teachers are learning together. But as Richard Nelson (1989) suggests, "these teachers who are teaching in wonderfully creative ways are not telling their stories" (p. 633). Their stories need to be told and their voices need to be heard not only for self recognition and enlightenment for others but told as a way for them "to create an interlocking set of meanings" of their own pedagogy. Nelson also believes that the present climate of educational reform presents a challenge to teachers. "Teachers should take the current climate of reform as a challenge to use their creative abilities in more effective and challenging ways despite the obvious difficulties that hinder their best efforts" (633).

This research study is about a group of such teachers who have taken this challenge seriously and have met it in a thoughtful, creative and determined manner. I offer this study as a narrative model of teachers' taking responsibility for their own learning, seeking pedagogical insights through the telling and listening to each others' stories of classroom life.

CHAPTER 2

STORY OF RELATED LITERATURE

> In this... text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest. ... we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.
>
> Barthes, 1974, p. 5.

The literature which supports and illuminates this research study is vast and follows many pathways. In Barthes' words we may "gain access to it by several entrances" (p. 5). I have divided these "entrances" into two chapters.

This chapter presents the related literature I have viewed as important for the social and societal context for this study. This includes literature mentioned in the field of teacher education reform, teacher as researcher, reflective practitioner, teacher change, teacher thinking and the empowerment of teachers for the enhancement of their own professionalism. Chapter 3 will present the contribution of the literature on narrative which sheds light on, and constitutes the major theoretical framework for, this study. This literature includes perspectives on narrative and story from literary theory, narratology and psychology.

The Image of Teachers

The professional status of teachers cannot lay claim to the same status that the elite professions of medicine and law enjoy. Teaching, like parenting, in the eyes of the public has traditionally been viewed as something that anyone can do. Dillon (1988) laments that "despite recent developments, teaching remains one of the most voiceless and powerless of 'professions' " (p. 359).

Ironically, the educational reform movements which were implemented to enhance the teaching profession began by mandating how and what teachers should teach. As a matter of fact, the 1983 publication of **A Nation at Risk**, which launched the reform movement in the United States, not only declared "war" on "the mediocre education performance" (p. 2) of schools but also declared a kind of war on teachers. The well-intended efforts to control education by controlling teachers did not help the image of the teaching profession or the enhanced professionalism of the teacher (Edelsky, 1988).

The resulting mandated reform movements by various state governments was to make teaching much more of a "bureaucratic" profession where teachers were held accountable for educational decisions in which they had no voice. Consequently, the status of the individual teacher and her or his self esteem fell to a very low ebb (Bacharach, 1990; Boyer, 1988; Goodlad, 1990; Sarason, 1990). In spite of the bureaucratic mold in which teachers' freedom to teach is so often curtailed in many school systems, there are still many teachers seeking ways to improve their professional development. How can teachers be empowered to make a

difference not only to their own professionalism but also to the improvement of the practice of teaching? One way teachers can make a difference is to examine their own thinking and educational assumptions through classroom inquiry and reflection.

TEACHER AS RESEARCHER

The notion of teacher researcher has been identified with a number of different terms over the past several years. Terms such as "action research", "collaborative research", "classroom enquiry" and "teacher as learner" all describe some aspect of the concepts involved in the teacher as researcher. All of these terms describe, in some form, research that is rooted in classroom experience.

Sometimes this research begins with teachers thinking about their students and asking themselves certain questions concerning events going on in their classrooms. Their initial questions may stem from something that is going particularly well and causes the teacher to wonder, "What is going on while students are writing that allows such creative stories to be written?" "How do they go about choosing topics for writing?" Or, a question may arise out of a problem area and cause the teacher to ask, "Why are only some of the students understanding this particular mathematical concept I'm teaching?" There is also the serendipitous aspect where a question comes about quite accidentally, and the teacher begins to wonder why, to make guesses, a hypothesis grows and a mini-research study begins to take shape.

Then the teacher starts to see herself or himself not only as a teacher but as a researcher in the classroom. Researching sometimes involves the teacher's focusing on a specific question or, as Britton (1987) suggests, may be viewed by the teacher as an on-going process of discovery and a part of the day-to-day work of teaching.

Classroom research is usually carried out independently, or in a collaborative arrangement with another teacher or colleague from the outside, such as a university professor or a school district consultant. The benefits of collaborative research are many. Teachers have the opportunity to work with experienced researchers and can often learn a great deal about the whole process of gathering information and making sense of data. In turn, the outside researcher has an opportunity to learn much about teaching and about the complexities of the classroom from the teacher.

Collaboration in Classroom Research

As the notion of teacher researcher has become more widely practiced, we are seeing more teachers and outside researchers working together in various ways within a collaborative arrangement (Applebee, 1987; Clark, 1986; Erickson, 1989; Martin, 1984). About collaboration, Frederick Erickson (1989) comments: "Collaborative practice is essential for excellent teaching and learning in classrooms. This seems especially true given current emphases in educational reform on teaching, that fosters reasonings and understanding by students and on the professional empowerment of teachers" (p. 430).

Chris Clark (1986) sees collaborative research within three major models. The friendship model where the teacher and researcher are involved in an on-going friendship; the teacher-team and catalyst model where teachers are already working together and the researcher joins the "team"; and the cruise-ship model where the teachers are involved in a project already going on by the university.

However, collaboration between the classroom teacher as co-researcher and a researcher from outside the classroom has raised some controversy and concern among certain educators. The focus of the concern is on the direction and the nature of the collaboration. It involves a clear understanding by the participants of what the term "collaboration" means to each person.

In the past, when research which involved an outside researcher and a teacher was carried out in the classroom, it was usually understood on the basis of cooperation rather than collaboration. The teacher cooperated by offering the classroom for research, but the understanding was mainly that the learning and the findings belonged to the outside researcher. As Carr and Kemmis (1986) point out very emphatically, "It is entirely inappropriate for researchers to treat teachers as objects for scientific inspection, or as clients who accept and apply scientific solutions" (p. 126).

They believe that the successful implementation of action research is not an easy task and that it will only be possible when researchers are prepared "to merge their separate identities and collaborate with teachers in a common effort to resolve educational problems and improve

educational practices" (p. 127). But if the teacher also becomes a researcher along with the outside person, the project becomes a collaborative one, and the findings belong to both people involved. This point is especially important when the research process is considered a form of professional development for the teacher. It is essential that the learning that takes place through the research be engaged in by both researchers involved.

Henry (1986) considers collaborative research to be "the development of research participants through critical self-analysis" (p. 86). Collaboration, according to Henry, can only occur between people after trust, respect, openness and equality of ownership in the research task have been established. Participants in collaborative research are, in Freire's (1972) phrase, "co-authors of liberating action" (p. 136).

Henry also believes that teachers are educational researchers and "that they can shape their research, if they choose to become systematic, analytical and reflective about their own educational practices" (p. 90). He points out that "to undertake action research a teacher plans a strategic action, implements the action, observes the effect of the action in the educational setting and reflects on the action and its outcomes" (p. 90). This process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting are "the core enquiry process of action research, and if undertaken systematically and with concern for rigour, are capable of promoting conceptual change (theory building) accompanied by improved practice" (p. 90). For Henry the term "action research" means teacher research and he believes that "teachers are the action researchers and the assisting individuals are probably behaving as facilitators to the enquiry process" (p. 90).

Applebee (1987), in speaking of the role of the teacher in the process of collaborative research, also suggests that the relationship between teacher and outside researcher requires a mutual respect for each others' expertise. Each person brings a different perspective and "it is this difference that makes the collaboration potentially so productive" (p. 714).

Whether the role of the teacher involves collaboration or independent learning, the process involved in teachers engaging in systematic observation in their own classrooms serves as a valuable means to professional development. Bissex (1986) describes the teacher researcher as an observer in the classroom, someone who sees and re-sees from another perspective. She reminds us "that anyone can observe children, but those who are a teacher researcher observe with an informed eye" (p. 483). This does not mean that only teachers who are researchers see with an informed eye, but that teachers who are committed to learning through teaching are already oriented toward going beyond the surface aspects of a situation, to seeing it's significance for pedagogy. Bissex also describes the teacher res cher as a "questioner, a learner and a more complete teacher."

Britton (1987) speaks of classroom research as a "quiet form of research" (p.18). Britton also makes the connection between teaching and researching and on-going teacher development. He claims "Teaching is something we do; research findings are something we come to know; development is the process by which we bring this kind of knowing into relation with this kind of doing" (p. 18).

The teacher as researcher concept is linked strongly to terms such as "empowerment" and "liberation" of teachers. The original notion emanated

mainly from the work and ideas of Lawrence Stenhouse in England in the 1960's. Central to his notion of the teacher researcher was the idea of emancipation. According to Stenhouse (1984), "Emancipation is the process involved in liberating teachers and students from a system of education that denies individual dignity and by returning to those individuals some degree of self worth through the exercise of professional judgement" (p. 94). Carr and Kemmis (1986) support a similar view when they point out that, "a primary task for any research activity ... is to emancipate teachers from their dependence on habit and tradition by providing them with the skills and resources that will enable them to reflect upon and examine critically the inadequacies of different conceptions of educational practice" (p. 123).

Becoming a teacher researcher is a liberating notion. In this way the concept is closely related to Stenhouse's notion of emancipation. As teachers grow more confident in asking their own questions and wanting to make sense of their own experiences, they can experience a tremendous sense of freedom to test, to create and to reflect on their own theories of learning.

Constructivist Perspective

In planning and organizing this study of teachers' narratives I have deliberately included particular qualities which strongly reflect the principles and theories of creating meaning or learning put forth by the constructivist tradition (Barnes, 1975; Bruner, 1986; Polanyi, 1978). That is to say, the learner is an active participant in the creation of his or her own knowledge and that learning is interactive and socially and culturally

constructed. Within this study, meaning and knowledge are created through the power of narrative in the form of storytelling in conversation.

The concept of teachers learning and building their own theories is based on the theoretical perspective of constructivism. MacKinnon (1988) describes this perspective as one in which "a learner continually constructs meaning of new information and events, as a result of the interaction of that individual's prior knowledge and experiences with his or her current observations" (p. 17). Wells and Chang (1986) describe the theoretical framework which supports the notion of teacher as researcher when they say, "The most effective learning occurs when the learner is treated as an active constructor of his or her own knowledge and is given the opportunity to share the responsibility for the selection, organization and evaluation of the tasks through which knowledge and competence are acquired" (p. 1).

So often when we think of the teacher as a researcher, we focus on the research project itself rather that on the researcher as teacher and person. We tend to overlook the learning aspect for the teacher that is involved in the act of doing the research project. Yet if we view the act of classroom research as professional development, this aspect of teacher as learner is one of the major strengths in teachers becoming researchers in their own classrooms.

Teachers who have engaged in classroom research are usually very willing to share their experiences. Goswami and Stillman (1987) have gathered many reports from teacher researchers. These reports from teachers reveal how "they become critical, responsive readers and users of current research, less apt to accept uncritically others' theories, less

vulnerable to fads, and more authoritative in their assessment of curricula, methods and materials" (p. 1).

One of the goals of teaching is to help students grow in critical thinking. In order to enable students to develop as critical thinkers, teachers must engage in critical thinking themselves. Critical thinking can, however, lead to change and this can become a very powerful means of teacher development. But with many teachers it is this very fact of changing that holds them back from engaging in thinking critically.

Even for those teachers who do not fear change, participating in research within the classroom or calling oneself a teacher researcher will not automatically result in becoming a critical thinker. Critical thinking takes time to develop and it involves serious and thoughtful consideration of conventional meanings and ideas we have perhaps carried with us for a long time. It involves rethinking and confirming or rejecting what we have previously taken for granted. It involves distancing ourselves on the one hand in order to engage in critical self-analysis and, on the other hand, coming back with a clearer understanding of what we already know.

Sometimes within the academic community, there is a tendency to misunderstand the concept of teacher researcher and to view the process as a less credible form of research. This misunderstanding may be due to the nature of the term itself. The word "research" is only appropriate for the teacher researcher concept if one understands the meaning of research as an act of seeing and re-seeing, of learning and discovering in a personal way. But the word "research" itself can also be extremely problematic when used in relation to classroom enquiry based on a different set of beliefs about the purpose of the research project, and the importance of the findings

being generalizable to other situations. What is learned in the teacher researcher context may not be generalizable in a scientific sense to other classrooms. Yet it may be extremely important knowledge for the particular teacher involved and, if it influences the way he or she thinks and acts with children, then this mode of research is a valuable form of professional development.

Some teacher researchers, in order to escape the behavioural objectives model, shy away from the word "research" and tend to call what they are doing in the classroom "enquiry" or "self monitoring". The study entitled **Closely Observed Children** (1980) by Michael Armstrong is considered by many language arts educators to be an excellent example of quality research. However, Armstrong de-emphasizes the fact that what he did in the classroom was research when he says:

> I have grown impatient with the concept of research. In the context of the study of education it has acquired too narrow a connotation, especially in regard to criteria for rigour, evidence and validity. I prefer the word 'enquiry'. ... The form of enquiry that I have in mind, is grounded in the experience of teaching and in particular in the practice of sustained observation which is inseparable from good teaching (cited by D. Hopkins, 1984, p. 97).

Hopkins, in commenting on Armstrong's observations, says: "What he is impatient of is narrowly defined psycho-statistical research that generally has little to say to teachers. But it is no answer to call it something different" (p. 98). Hopkins considers research, enquiry and self

monitoring as aspects of a similar activity because, "They all require systematic, self conscious and rigourous reflection to be of any value" (p. 98).

The Reflective Practitioner

One of the most important aspects of the teacher as researcher in relation to teacher development is the teacher as reflective practitioner. This aspect introduces a further dimension to research carried out by teachers within their own classrooms. It emphasizes the on-going means of developing as a reflective and thoughtful teacher since it concentrates on one of the major ways we all learn, through serious thought and contemplation — through reflection.

The term "reflective practitioner" also suggests a discriminating teacher who is engaged not only in the act of thinking seriously but in the act of doing or practice, or what Schön (1987) refers to as "reflection-in-action" (p. 26). Schön, whose work was strongly influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, points out that "our spontaneous knowing-in-action usually gets us through the day" (p. 26). Teachers in the classroom do not have a ready made solution for every problem that arises during the day. But when experiences or happenings which contain an element of surprise occur during the day, we may, as Schön (1986) indicates, brush it aside or we may respond to it by reflection. If we respond by reflection we may do so in one of two ways. "We may reflect on action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome (or alternatively). ...We may reflect in the midst of action without interrupting it" (p. 26).

Teachers who are involved in classroom inquiry as teacher researchers often speak of reflection in relation to their learning through researching. Many teachers mention the way the researching has heightened an awareness of the need for reflection as a part of their teaching. They realize now how little reflection they actually engaged in because they were so busy "teaching". For example, Lucinda Ray (1987), a classroom teacher in Northfield, Massachusetts, commented that for her "the most significant finding is that the very act of undertaking and continuing a classroom research project forced me to take time to reflect upon what was happening in my classroom" (p. 220). She also shared her view of what the term "reflect" actually meant for her. "Reflect is a multifaceted term. It includes remembering, thinking, mirroring, creating images, and changing perspectives" (p. 220).

Judith Newman (1990) confirms what my own experience has shown me concerning teachers who engage in reflection about the things they are doing in the classroom. She describes how teachers become increasingly aware of not only what they are doing, but why they are doing the things they are doing. As they reflect on their practice, they sometimes find that the actions they are carrying out in the classroom are not based on good pedagogy. They discover through thoughtful reflection that many things they are doing do not really make sense or mesh with what they intuitively believe about children and learning. They have just taken on, without question, somebody else's practice. This heightened awareness often leads to teachers changing their behaviour to match more closely their own beliefs. Thus, the reflective practitioner begins to understand the importance of not only talking about the blending of theory and practice, but

experiencing this congruency by living it in the daily business of classroom life. When the understanding becomes clearer for the teacher learner, she/he is much more capable of explaining and articulating this knowledge as an effective teacher to others such as parents and administrators (Newman 1990, pp. 19-24).

Amanda Branscombe (1987), a teacher at Auburn High School, Alabama, collaborated with anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath on a classroom research project involving grade nine students' letter writing. As a result of this project Branscombe says she became a learner and a seeker. She also "experienced personal and professional growth while working with the researcher and the students" (p. 217). At the beginning of the project, she says, "I was the typical classroom teacher who felt that my role was to stand in front of the room and pour knowledge into my students, while they stay at the desk and learned" (p. 217). But she points out that as the year progressed she gave up that role and became "a co-learner with students."

Thinking about why we do the things we do in the classroom, and coming to a sense of harmony and congruence with our beliefs and practice is one way the teacher researcher goes about finding his or her way as a professional teacher (Newman, 1990). It is in a sense building one's own pedagogy, coming to terms with what is important or what is significant in our teaching. This kind of reflection often involves reflecting on why we teach the way we do; how we develop a particular style in our teaching.

Whether we call ourselves teacher researchers or whether we are just concerned with good teaching, we need to become learners within the classroom to learn from our observations of children and from our practice.

In this way we begin to shape our own professional development by building our own knowledge, our own theories about teaching and learning, rather than blindly following the "path well trod" by those who came before us. Constructing our own knowledge and taking the initiative in our professional development is very important for teachers to become clearer about not only what we are doing but why we are doing it.

When teachers begin to learn deliberately, to examine their previously accepted behaviour within their own practice, they are not only developing professionally as teachers but they are developing as critical thinkers and human beings. Teachers need to take their place in society as critical thinkers, to evaluate and monitor issues in education that inevitably affect their own lives and the lives of children. It is only when teachers engage in reflection and critical thinking that they will open up possibilities for the kind of change that reflects understanding and growth as persons.

CHAPTER 3

THE STORY OF NARRATOLOGY

> Story is everywhere. No culture, no civilization, no human group has ever been found that does not use story as its basic and usual means of communication.
>
> Aidan Chambers, 1983, p. 20.

What is a story? When most of us think of stories we usually think of children's books, novels, fables or fairytales. When we think of the storyteller we may think of ancient tales of travelling minstrels and balladeers. If we think about storytellers today, we might envisage the stand-up comic, the spinner of yarns or the person who is the "life of the party" and amuses us in social settings with jokes and personal anecdotes. Seldom do we have reasons to think of the subtleties of stories as narrative, how they are constructed, what they have in common and the ways they convey meaning and understanding. We simply enjoy reading or hearing stories and use them in a variety of situations to tell one another about ourselves — what has happened to us and when and why. There are many different ways and traditions, however, to think about the nature and the function of stories.

The Nature of Story and Narrative

The Oxford English Dictionary defines story as "a narrative, true, or presumed to be true, relating to important events." **Webster's Collegiate Dictionary's** definition of story is "an account of incidents or events", and "a fictional narrative shorter than a novel." These definitions reflect the paradoxical and elusive nature of both story and narrative. Stories can be "true" or "fictitious". A good story features certain elements that can provide both children and adults with access to imaginative and believable learning experiences. Stories have a way of acting on us while at the same time we are acting on them in a very personal way. C.S. Lewis (1977) says that stories strike different chords of emotions in each one of us. Experiencing a story can bring about feelings of hope, joy, tenderness, excitement, surprise, suspense and many different kinds of fears.

Gerald Prince (1987) in A **Dictionary of Narratology** says that the meaning of story is narrative. He makes a distinction however, between story and narrative when he says, "Every story is a narrative but not every narrative is necessarily a story" (p. 91). To illustrate this point he suggests that we consider "the narratives that are merely recounting a temporal sequence of events that are not causally related" (p. 91).

Egan (1986) considers stories as narrative units. He points out that it is important to consider them as units in order to distinguish them from other kinds of narratives. What distinguishes stories from other narratives, according to Egan, is that stories have a clear beginning and end. Story can be entertainment, and most often is, but it is also much more. "The story", as Egan suggests, "reflects a basic and powerful form in

which we make sense of the world and experience" (p. 2). Barbara Hardy (1977), speaking of narrative, argues that narrative "like lyric or dance, is not to be regarded as an aesthetic invention used by artists to control, manipulate, and order experience, but as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life" (p. 12). Hardy extends this point of view by suggesting that we need to turn to story and to novels to find out more about the wide range of narrative. She stresses the relationships and "the qualities which fictional narrative share with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives" (p. 13). The significance of Hardy's ideas for this study of teachers' story narratives as context for learning, however, is strongly expressed in this quotation:

> For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social pasts and future. (Hardy, 1977, p. 13)

The Multifunctional Nature of Narrative and Story

The most inclusive meaning for the word "narrative", according to Polkinghorne (1988), refers to any spoken or written presentation. For example, essays or reports are written in narrative as opposed to lists, charts or tables. However, Polkinghorne's main interest in the term "narrative" is its multifunctional nature, which is a central feature of narrative in this study. He says that "it can refer to the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process —

also called 'stories', 'tales' or 'histories' " (p. 13). It is in this sense that Polkinghorne uses "narrative" and "story" interchangeably.

Genette's (1980) study also involves the most widespread meaning of narrative as narrative discourse or narrative text. Genette uses the word story for the signified or narrative content, and uses the word narrative for the signifier or narrative text itself, and the word narrating for the producing action.

Although the terms "story" and "narrative" are seldom clearly defined in the literature, for the most part researchers use these terms interchangeably. In this study I will use the word "story" and "narrative" interchangeably, except where I will refer to the process and structure of written discourse as narrative. I will also use narrative in the way Chatman (1978) suggests, "the what of narrative I call it 'story', the way of narrative I call it 'discourse'" (p. 9). Chatman considers the what of narrative to be the components of "story, events and existents (character and setting). The way or discourse is the means through which the story is transmitted" (p. 9).

Novak (1978) says, "A story is a narrative that links sequences" (p. 49). He speaks of stories as a structure of time and a linking of standpoints or a linking of the "who" in who we are, at a given point in time (p. 53).

While the literature on narrative is vast, the literature on teachers' stories, especially on teachers telling their stories as a way of making sense of their world of teaching, is very limited. Although the university libraries are filled with narrative in a variety of genres, very few books or studies are available which directly relate to teachers' stories of their professional lives

as a form of their own professional development. Nor are there many studies of teachers' engaging in the process of making meaning by creating narrative in story form as a way of ordering and understanding experience.

However, narrative in all its forms, is no longer the preserve of only the literary critics. We increasingly see story and narrative as one of the fundamental sources for presenting research data (Clandinin 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Rosen, 1985). Rosen (1988), in his seminal work within the field of narratology, outlines the various disciplines which in some form deal with the theory and the analysis of narrative — anthropology, history, literary criticism, literary studies, linguistics, theology, psychology, ethnography and folklore. He concludes by saying, "There is hardly a discipline in the area of social sciences and humanistic studies that has not turned its attention to narrative and its cognitive significance" (p. 165). In this literature story on narrative, I will begin at the beginning with orality and narrative, because all stories are rooted in the oral tradition.

Orality and Narrative

Roland Barthes (1977), "a narratologist par excellence", to use Harold Rosen's words, and considered by Donald Polkinghorne to be one of the most important literary theorists, points out the centrality and the universality of narrative to people's lives when he says, "Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (p. 79).

Today, we take the skills of reading and writing and other complex forms of communication as commonplace in our literate society. Yet, for centuries people lived without reading or writing but were able to communicate effectively, although this communication was limited. It is difficult even to imagine a time when people lived almost entirely without the written word. Oral cultures existed a great many milleniums longer than our present literate society. In terms of the media of communications, Walter Ong (1967) divides culture into three successive stages: (1) oral or oral-aural — which implies the teller and the listener as participants (2) script which goes through stages, for example, first the alphabet and then later alphabetic moveable type (the invention of the printing press), and (3) electronics, for example, radio and television.

Oral cultures may not have any historic records but they do have memory. Memory which was so important to oral cultures for their survival is also very important today in autobiography and personal stories which I will discuss later. Yet, the memory skills developed in oral cultures were quite different from those in our literate societies. In oral cultures, the epics which were sung by many different singers and storytellers were never sung or told with the same words. What Ong (1967) found was that in a particular epic, although the words might be different, "the conversation of incident and narrative structure is nevertheless surprising — the general story varies little from one telling to another. But the words always do" (p. 24).

In oral cultures the epic poets, balladeers and wandering minstrels were relaxed and enjoyed working in a carefree atmosphere. Verbalized learning in oral cultures took place in what Ong (1967) suggests, was an

"atmosphere of celebration and play" (p. 30). Verbal learning was not thought of as "work". The idea of verbal learning and understanding as "work" as opposed to "play" came about with the invention of writing. This is an idea that, unfortunately, has permeated throughout the school system for more than a century. Where the schooling of young children is concerned this notion has often impeded their learning and the development of their narrative competence. Whereas, in oral cultures, play, entertainment and learning for all aged people were fully and naturally integrated. Story in song or verse was considered a valid means of knowing and communicating that knowing to others.

Ong (1982) traces orality to its earliest roots and concludes that "the study of the contrast between orality and literacy is largely unfinished business ... liberating our text-bound minds and setting much of what has long been familiar in new perspectives" (p.156). It is only recently, according to Ong, that literary history has turned its attention to possibilities offered by orality-literacy studies. Oral narratives did not cease with the coming of writing or with the technology of print. We have never departed from the oral tradition, for as Ong (1982) points out, "the manuscript culture in the west was always marginally oral" (p.157).

Ong also found that in the twentieth century reading aloud in family groups and small groups of people with similar interests was still common. But with the coming of technology in communication, such groups now gathered around the radio and television rather than the pot-bellied stove at the general store, the kitchen table, the piano or at family and social gatherings. Technology has not eliminated storytelling as I have already indicated. There is a revival of oral storytelling. "The storyteller is back in

the market place, luring folk from their TV sets and stereos just when we have been told storytelling was dead, slaughtered by commercial culture" (Rosen 1988a, p. 166).

The Revival of Storytelling

Lister Sinclair in his 1986 CBC series **Ideas** included a two part program entitled "The Magic of Storytelling". The program prepared and presented by Vera Rosenbluth, a broadcaster from Victoria, British Columbia dealt with the revival of oral storytelling that has occurred in the past fifteen years. She interviewed a number of storytellers who were involved in both the gathering of oral stories and the retelling of such stories.

For instance, Maria Campbell (1986) comes from a long line of Metis storytellers and tells how oral storytelling has been a very important factor in keeping that culture alive. She was the first of many Metis storytellers to use a typewriter. In her autobiography she traces her life when leaving her community and then back again to her roots. She says, "When you first leave, your little bundle of stories doesn't seem like very much, but then you discover that's where your power is" (p. 4). Maria Campbell began listening to stories as a young child. Her great grandmother was a storyteller, but as Campbell says, "she was also a healer, and a midwife, and she used stories a lot for that" (p. 4).

The types of stories which Maria Campbell tells is what Rosenbluth (1986) calls one strand of the storytelling revival — the traditionalist, those people who grew up in an oral culture. The other strand is the revivalist or

those people coming from a print tradition. It is this variety of people that Rosenbluth has telling stories on this CBC program. Many of these storytellers worked with children and told stories to these children as teachers, librarians and at summer camp. Others told stories at festivals such as the one at Jonesboro, Tennessee where thirteen years ago about a hundred people gathered at what is now an annual affair known as the Annual Storytelling Festival. In 1986, four thousand people attended.

Cathryn Wellner (1986), a storyteller who has told stories to two people and to thousands of people at festivals, says that when you're telling a story, "It's like weaving a tapestry together, and the pattern that you weave is beautiful ... and it isn't just the storyteller doing the weaving, the audience is doing it too. The audience shapes the story very much" (p. 5).

The Language of Stories

Daniel Yashinsky (1986), a children's storyteller, thinks there is a language of stories. It is a language of understanding, and he believes we need to learn this language once again and take it seriously. As he says, "In our society, if you want to say something true, people assume that you are going to give them a piece of information. Data is true in our society. In other times, though, they didn't think that data was the ultimate standard of truth; they thought stories were" (p. 7).

What makes stories so powerful? It is not merely the entertaining or enthralling aspects of story but it is as Rosenbluth (1986) says, "The teaching or healing that they contain" (p. 9).

Michale Gabriel, a teacher and storyteller, would agree with Bauman, Polanyi, Rosen, Stahl, and others referred to in this study that everyone has the power of story within them. She believes that "the key here is to find the keys to unlock those stories that are imprinted on our souls" (1986, p. 11). She believes that her work as a teacher is to facilitate that unlocking through stories, and to unleash the disposition to use narrative in ways that Chambers, Rosen, Hardy and others believe is inside us all.

The revival of storytelling is very important to our way of knowing ourselves, our culture and our past. What is even more relevant to this study, however, is that storytelling of personal experiences, if engaged in by people who are teachers of children, can serve as an invitation to use narrative to unlock the stories of our assumptions that underlie our teaching and learning practices in our work with children.

Personal Experience Stories

Sandra Stahl, professor of folklore at Indiana University, has written widely about her studies on folklore narrative. I have summarized my interpretation of her ideas in the following section.

Personal experience stories, Stahl (1983) says, "are first-person narratives usually composed orally by the tellers and based on real incidents in their lives" (p. 268). A few lines later, she adds that "the personal experience story as a genre has been a part of oral tradition for a long time" (p. 269). Stahl describes how the raw material for the experience recreated in storyform may be found in various incidents such as childhood

experiences, school, play, or even incidents that might reveal embarrassing moments. The possibilities in our daily living provide us with almost limitless experiences for narrative creation. She suggests, however, that to be meaningful, in a meaning making way, personal experience stories have to be more than just the recounting or the retelling of a particular incident or happening. The incident first of all must be, in Stahl's term, "story worthy" in the eyes of the teller and the listeners. The narrative also needs to be rooted in, and shaped by, some of the characteristic aspects of storyform, such as plot, setting, characters, incident, beginning and ending to show how these dimensions are connected one to another.

The stories teachers tell must not only be considered "story worthy" and have their existents in the actions of people, but Stahl acknowledges the significance of the cultural and social factors revolving around personal experience stories. She would agree with Bauman (1986) that if the stories are to have meaning, they need to be viewed contextually and ethnographically in order to expose the individual social and cultural factors that give them shape and meaning.

Stahl also emphasizes the vulnerable position the storyteller can place him/ herself in by exposing an intimate side of self. She speaks of the courage required by the narrator to bring forward values for the scrutiny of the audience. Stahl suggests, however, that to reveal a side of self can make the narrator vulnerable, yet at the same time, by not hiding that vulnerability, it can make the narrator a hero when he or she courageously accepts responsibility for the story.

Lastly, I conclude with Stahl's words, which express the significance of her work for this study. She explains the potential that stories offer to the

storyteller to organize and reflect on experience. "Existentially, the personal experience narrator not only acts or experiences but 'thinks about' his action, evaluates it, learns from it, and tells the story — not to express his values, but to build them, to create them, to remake them each time he tells his stories" (p. 274).

STUDIES OF TEACHERS' STORIES

Two very important sources of teachers' stories which provide insights into the professional life of classroom teachers are offered by Philip Jackson (1968) in **Life in Classrooms** and Ken Macrorie (1984) in **Twenty Teachers.**

Life in Classrooms

Jackson's (1968) **Life in Classrooms** provides a picture of classroom life that is only too familiar to teachers. This study was one of the first published studies of stories of teaching. His observations in several elementary schools over a period of two years allowed him a view of classroom life that he describes as often complex, unpredictable, confining, chaotic, hectic and a place where countless interruptions and petty delays occur. He found, however, that while observing teachers in action told him *some* things, watching, in itself, was not enough to discover the kind of reasoning that drove the teachers' actions. While Jackson recognized that observation of teachers and classrooms plays a vital role in educational research, he felt that it was important to explore the kind of thinking that

lay behind the intuitive knowledge and actions of teachers. As he says, "the teacher's classroom behavior does not always reveal what we want to know" (p. 115).

In order to discover more about the teachers views of themselves and their attitude toward students and teachers, Jackson followed his belief that "talk is necessary, particularly talk about the professional aspects of life in the classroom" (p. 115). He felt that the teachers' stories needed to be told and analysed in order to know what and how good teachers went about their work in classrooms.

Jackson engaged in many conversations with fifty outstanding teachers, conversations he characterized as "professional shoptalk." The selection of these fifty outstanding teachers was made on the judgement of their administrative supervisors and also on the fact that these teachers wanted to develop professionally. The interviews Jackson conducted with these teachers reveal more about teaching and learning and teaching practices than classroom observation alone. Jackson found that these teachers were faced with complex decisions on a daily basis. But as they pondered the wisdom of their decisions, Jackson discovered that their concerns were not limited "to the achievement of educational objectives. They also worry about whether they were just or unjust ... sensitive or insensitive to the nuances of the events that transpired" (p. 167).

Jackson believes that the role of participant observer provides researchers with a greater understanding of what goes on in the school. But he also suggests that information about teaching and learning need not be limited to outside researchers. He points out that, "In addition to

participant observers it might be wise to foster the growth of observant participants in our schools — teachers, administrators and, perhaps, even students, who have the capacity to step back from their own experiences, view them analytically, and talk about them articulately" (p. 175).

Twenty Teachers

Ken Macrorie, in his study of **Twenty Teachers** (1984), selected teachers whose students did what he referred to as good works. "They were not teachers who pass on the accepted knowledge of the world and get it back from students in tests, but enablers who helped others do good works and extend their already considerable powers" (p. xi). "Enablers", Macrorie discovered, "learned from each other's responses and good works" (p. 229). The teachers' stories revealed that these teachers saw learning going on all around them. Macrorie discovered that they did not suffer from despair or boredom because "these inflictions, common to so many teachers, were turned into excitement and that satisfying pleasure which comes from taking initiative and working rigourously" (p. 249). On the other hand "enabling which is often contrary to the lecture-test-grade-system can prove uncomfortable" (p. 249) because teachers as enablers can feel a lack of interest and support by their administrators or colleagues. When this happens it is very easy to lose confidence in oneself and to lose the desire to teach creatively.

The teachers in this study have a great deal in common with Macrorie's twenty enabling teachers. For over a year, they deliberately came together and shared not only their stories, but shared themselves as

they listened and responded to their peers. Together, they did what Macrorie describes as "the most powerful bit of enabling ever done" (p. 247).

NARRATIVE AS A WAY OF KNOWING

As I have already noted, the literature on narrative and its various genres (epics, myths, folktales, legends, ballads, biography, novels) is quite voluminous, whereas, the literature on the power of personal stories in narrative is very limited. I will not attempt to examine all the ambiguities surrounding narrative, but will concentrate on the studies and theories of narrative that, for me, have illuminated its complex nature and significance as a powerful means of constructing meaning.

The research and writings of Barthes, Bauman, Chatman, Genette, Novak and Polkinghorne have all, in different ways, contributed to my knowledge of the history, the structure and the meaning of the power of narrative for understanding experience. Their work is cited throughout these pages and is reflected in many of the interpretive ideas I have written about throughout this dissertation. But at the core of most of the ideas in this thesis is the work of Harold Rosen, whose studies in narratology I have drawn on very strongly. His work has been particularly inspirational and meaningful for my study, mainly because it is rooted in a deep understanding of language and literary theory and it is centred on narrative and story within an educational context. His writings, our personal correspondence and my brief studies with him, have given me an encouraging starting point to try to understand the complex notion of narrative as meaning making in our everyday lives as teachers. Rosen's work in narratology has

also shown me, as a language educator, the potential and possibilities for narrative in literacy learning, especially with young children. In the following section I will attempt to synthesize the part of his work that has been most influential for this study.

Harold Rosen and the Importance of Stories

Harold Rosen, a former director of the University of London Institute of Education, has spent a lifetime studying narrative in all its forms. His theories of narratology stem from European structuralists such as Bakhtin, Barthes, Genette, Todorov, and American critics such as Booth, Chatman and Culler. This is, in Rosen's term, "the universe of scholarly thought" that has served as the basis of his own thinking and writing. Rosen (1988a) shows how literary studies in recent years have "shifted from the evaluation of cannonical novels ("great books") to how narrative works in novels and short stories" (p. 165).

In recent years his interest has focused on the power of narrative in the development of communicative competence. He is especially interested in the examination of discourse processes that lead to the storyteller learning by telling or retelling a story.

Rosen (1987) suggests that we need to "treat oral narrative as the foundation stone of narrative practices and look at its various forms from its spontaneous occurrences embedded in everyday conversation to "framed" stories such as anecdotes, narrative jokes, and autobiographical reminiscences". He also has concentrated on narrative and story in the area of multiculturalism and with second language learners.

Rosen (1988a) says that for many years he "has been chasing the huge literature that has accumulated around narrative" (p. 164). Yet in all of the scholarly books, research papers, and articles which he has consumed he has yet to find "a major work which presents a coherent educational theory of narrative" (p. 164). But what is even sadder, as far as Rosen is concerned, is that "we have no full account of narrative in the classroom by teachers who believe in it as a pillar of the curriculum and who have translated that belief into practice — the educational world does not accept that telling the tales of teaching as richly and honestly as we know how is a totally valid means of teaching others" (p. 164). The practice of "gradually supplanting narrative as students progress through the school system" has been an ongoing concern for Rosen. It is from this concern that Rosen in 1985 issued an invitation to teachers in both Britain and Canada to engage in a research project to examine narrative in the classroom across all subject areas.

Rosen shows very little patience for those who think that narrative is just for children and as they go through the school system and become adults that they put away stories as they do other childish things. He demonstrates how the stories used by Betty Rosen (1988) in a classroom of boys aged eight to eighteen in a poor working class district of London served as a "valid means of teaching each other."

Rosen (1985) believes that we would likely take everyday stories more seriously, "if we perceived them first and foremost as the product of the disposition of the human mind to narratize experience and to transform its findings which as social beings, we may share and compare with those of others" (p. 12).

Story is all around us in our daily discourse as Rosen (1985) says, "The story is always out there but the important step has still to be taken. The unremitting flow of events must first be selectively attended to, interpreted as holding relationships, causes, motives, feeling, consequences — in a word, meanings" (p. 13). In addition to selecting the events to recount, "we must also take another step and invent, yes invent, beginnings and ends for out there are no such things" (p. 13). Constructing a story to arrive at meaning is only part of the narrative. The story, to be effective, must be verbalized, it must be told. It needs an audience even if the audience is only the storyteller. That is why Rosen (1985) points out that narratologists have always drawn the important distinction between:

- the story — the events (real or imaginary) being referred to.
- the narrative — those events verbalized.
- the narrating — the act of producing the narrative.

Stories are part of our culture and from infancy, we learn the grammar structure of our culture through them. Consequently there will be different ways of telling stories. However, Rosen (1985) says that "stories are as they are, only because others exist; they are intertextual" (p. 15). We learn from stories and we build on stories even though the style of telling and the reason for telling may not be the same.

Rosen stresses the important relationship between storyteller and storylistener. This relationship is essential if the story is to be meaningful. "This relationship", as Rosen (1985) sees it, "is always interchangeable, always a collaboration" (p. 25). He emphasizes the educational power of narrative and seeks out examples of stories embedded in our daily lives.

These stories are as significant, and often more so, than those we glean only from literary text.

Rosen (1986) discovered that usually it is the literary values that are stressed by most of us when we think of narrative. However, he believes that narrative has an importance much deeper than just its literary merits. He presents the following synthesis of the characteristics of narrative, held by those who have devoted time to the study of narratology:

- a mode of knowledge emerging from action.
- the imposition of formal coherence on the virtual chaos of human events.
- a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension.
- the central instance or function of human mind (1986, p.230).

Margaret Meek (1984) paid tribute to the work of Harold Rosen on the occasion of his retirement as chair in English Education. "He has been a force in English teaching for the evolution of a deep, systematic understanding of the language itself, its functions and what it creates, and of the ways in which it reflects the human passions that permeate history, language and societies in the process of change" (p. xix).

Narrative and Psychology

Another important work which helped me to understand from a different perspective, the history and significance of narrative expression as a means of understanding in human existence was Donald Polkinghorne's **Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences**.(1988)

Polkinghorne (1988) approaches the study of narrative from a background as researcher and practicing psychotherapist rather than that of literary theorist. His years of experience as a practitioner, in touch with other practitioners, led him to wanting to "work with the narratives people use to understand the human world" (p. xi). Polkinghorne's task, as he says, is an inquiry into narrative. He sees narrative meaning as "a cognitive process that organizes human experience into temporally meaningful episodes" (p. 1).

He goes much further than merely describing the organizing processes of narrative. His study involves an exploration into "what contribution the narrative scheme makes to the experience of human beings" (p. 15). He points out that narrative discourse and formal science each communicate "a different kind of truth", as he says, "Narrative recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts in a whole. Its particular subject matter is human actions and events that affect human beings" (p. 36).

Polkinghorne, in tracing the history of narrative as a cognitive structure, brings together the broadening changes that have occurred in both literary theory and the theories found in psychology. He points out how, more recently, literary theory has moved toward communicative competence in the investigation of functions of narrative. He discusses the ways that cognitive psychology has shifted in its understanding of language use, especially in the area of narrative discourse, during recent years. He says that psychology after 1950 turned "almost exclusively to working within the limits of a positivistic definition of formal science" (p. 101). However, according to Polkinghorne, after the 1970's, the shortcomings of

this approach were becoming evident to cognitive psychologists and psychology turned more toward investigating narrative as a cognitive structure. At this time, "The discipline opened itself to the investigation of cognitive processes and human experience" (p. 101).

Polkinghorne points out that "Confrontation between cognitive science and behaviorism came over the theory of language acquisition" (p. 108). Researchers have moved beyond the acquisition and understanding of language as outlined by Chomsky's model of innate grammar for understanding meaning of written and spoken language by individual sentences. Polkinghorne says that sentences are linked into discourses and into conversations and "one of the discourses that has been of special interest is narrative" (p. 109).

This was not always the case in the field of psychology, as Polkinghorne discovered in his work as a practicing psychotherapist and as an academic researcher. He found the traditional scientific research model adopted by social scientists somewhat limited when applied to human beings. This model, in its traditional form, did not produce the kind of results needed to help human or social conditions in education or in society generally. "Despite the large sums of public funds invested in the human disciplines ... little headway was made in solving social problems" (p. ix).

Polkinghorne does not believe that solutions to social problems lie in the natural science model. Rather, after several years of study, he has concluded that it is the practitioners who may be able to shed light on some of these problems. Polkinghorne believes "that practitioners, perhaps, are better common sense epitistomologists than academics" (p. x).

Polkinghorne's faith in the practitioner comes from his own observations of how they work with people's life stories everyday as an accessible and revealing picture of who these people, called "clients", are and why they do what they do.

Donald Schön (1987) shows that the professional, in the field through reflection in action, has arrived at knowledge which is not known to the academic researcher, or in most cases has been ignored. What Clandinin (1990), Egan (1986), Polkinghorne (1988), Rosen (1985), Schön (1987) among others discovered in their research was that the practitioners in the field work with "narrative knowledge". They work with understanding that comes not from facts and statistics alone, but from the stories that people tell and the meaning that these stories convey.

In education, Frank Smith has said repeatedly that by placing all our faith in educational psychologists we have backed the wrong horse. This statement comes from Smith's concern that educational experimental psychologists had, for years, underestimated or even ignored the social and cultural nature of learning. Little attention was given to the affective aspects in learning. In speaking of the image and development of "thinking" in relation to learning, Smith (1990) says, "Like learning, the development of thinking depends on the company we keep, it depends on the way we perceive ourselves, which depends in turn on the way other people treat us" (p. 125).

However, Smith agrees it is encouraging to note that many psychologists are taking a more holistic view of learning and now are looking far more closely at the "person" in the learner. They are also beginning to do more collaborative research with professionals in the field.

The work of Frank Smith, over many years, in the area of psychology and literacy is a story of change within a field of education that has influenced teachers' beliefs and everyday actions more than any other field of knowledge.

Neither Smith nor Polkinghorne dismiss the important contributions made by psychology and social science research generally. Nor does Jerome Bruner (1986), whose recent attention to narrative came as no surprise to Harold Rosen. "He (Bruner) has always been ready to address practical teaching matters and to apply his theory and research to the curriculum he has for a long time been a leading participant in seminars on narrative theory and practice" (Rosen, 1988a, p. 168).

Bruner (1986) points out "the importance of narrative as one of the two modes of thought — one mode the paradigmatic or logico-scientific, and the other the narrative mode". The narrative mode Bruner says, "is one of the ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality." Bruner sees the narrative and the paradigmatic coming to live side by side if we "move toward an understanding of what is involved in telling and understanding great stories and how it is that stories create a reality of their own" (pp. 42-43).

It is this kind of reality described by Bruner that is captured by some leading clinicians when writing about their experiences with neurological patients. Two such practitioners who have recorded their insights into the power of story are Oliver Sacks and Robert Coles. Their work, which was carried out within very concrete situations, enabled me to see once again the strength and the potential of narrative knowing and possible human transformation, especially in the lives of teachers.

Oliver Sacks

Oliver Sacks, a professor of clinical neurology, has written many books recounting the case histories of his neurological patients. In **The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat** (1970), he tells the stories of many patients who have lost their memory and have tragically become the object of misunderstanding or even cruelty and ridicule. Sacks says that, in most cases, these people have been dismissed as "retarded". Mr. Thompson was one such patient whose "memory had been playing him tricks." Thompson was unable to remember anything for more than a few seconds. Consequently, Thompson told story after story and improvised a world around himself which Sacks says was, for him, "a wholly normal, stable and factual world" (p. 109). Stories came naturally to Thompson, even though they were fantasy. This patients' experience was one of many which illustrated Sacks' belief that "we have, each of us, a life story, an inner narrative — whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a story narrative; and that this narrative is us, our identities" (p. 110). Sacks goes on to say that while we are not so different biologically or physically we are "historically, as narratives — each of us is unique" (p. 111).

Another of Oliver Sacks' patients was Rebecca a nineteen year old, who had no sense of space and suffered from left/right confusion. Suffering many cerebral and mental defects she was often treated as a "figure of fun". But she loved stories. She was able to look at the world and describe it in beautiful poetic words, yet she failed all the neurological and psychological tests administered to her. Sacks wondered how such "a charming girl, and a moron, a cognitive mishap — can use a narrative mode to compose and

integrate a coherent world, in place of the schematic mode, which, in her, is so defective that it simply doesn't work" (p. 181). This made clear to Sacks that Rebecca's actions, illustrated Bruner's (1986) two wholly separate and different forms of mind, "the paradigmatic and the narrative". Sacks says, that between these two modes "though equally natural and native to the expanding human mind, the narrative comes first, as spiritual priority" (p. 183). Sacks suggests this is the reason very young children are fascinated by stories and can understand even the most complex story forms and the matter they present. Yet, as Sacks says, "their powers of comprehending general concepts, paradigms, are almost non-existent. It is this narrative or symbolic power which gives a sense of the world — a concrete reality in the imaginative form of symbol and story — when abstract thought can provide nothing at all" (p. 184).

Robert Coles

Robert Coles, a teller of tales of peoples' lives, is described by Valerie Polakow (1985) as "an advocate, a social critic, and an engaged participant" in the lives of the people he encounters in his research (p. 831). Reading once again his narrative accounts of **Children of Crisis** (1967), I re-lived and re-learned the heartaches and struggle of children searching for meaning in their existence within the social, racial and class structures that surrounded them. I saw anew the power of story to move a reader to tears, but also to move this same reader toward what Polakow called, "wide awakeness" of the unfairness and injustice that exists in society.

In **The Call of Stories** (1989), Coles continues in the same tradition of telling and learning through the stories of other people. He tells his own life story within the context of the stories that have been told to him by his family, by his students and by his patients. He describes his teaching experiences and how he saw fictional characters and events in books shaping and influencing his students. He also describes his venturing into using stories from books, as well as using personal and conversational stories, in his professional life as a psychiatrist.

It was my reading of the chapter "Stories and Theories", in **The Call of Stories**, however, that I found most enlightening for my understanding of the power of story and narrative in my own research. Like Coles, I learned much from reading about Dr. Ludwig, one of Coles psychiatric supervisors, who encouraged him to listen to his patients' voices. "The people who come to see us bring us their stories", Dr. Ludwig told him. "They hope they tell them well enough so we understand the truths of their lives" (p. 70). At that time Coles had not thought of his patients as storytellers. Similarly, we usually do not think of teachers as storytellers. In thinking of the teachers who participated in this study, I am mindful of Cole's comments about the transformation he saw in his patients' facility to understand themselves more clearly when they were encouraged to tell their stories.

Many other voices are heard telling stories throughout this recent collections of narratives brought together by Robert Coles. As a reading that spoke strongly to my own belief in the importance of the subjective and personal experience that engagement with stories involves, Coles work holds a strong significance for this study.

Summary

The literature on narratology which I have emphasized in this chapter shows the wide range of perspectives on narrative and story that exist within the realm of the cultural, ethnic, literary, social and human science worlds. From these different perspectives, I have attempted to show the importance of narrative as a powerful means of understanding ourselves and the events in our everyday lives. Stories come in a variety of forms and are told for a variety of reasons, but all storytelling, I discovered, has its roots in the oral tradition.

There is a renewed interest in story, both in "the market place" and in the academic world of research. It seems, however, that the relationship between narrative and knowing is viewed differently, not only from one discipline to another, but even within the same discipline there exists a diversity of viewpoints. Within certain areas of history, literature and human and social science, narrative and story have grown in stature and understanding.

In certain approaches to human science research, such as ethnography, critical theory and phenomenology, where thick description and interpretation are important to method, story narratives are well established as a common methodological device. It would seem, however, that there is much exploration and work to be done in order to learn more about the nature and the function of narrative discourse in all its forms. We need to continue to explore the world of narrative and story as a

meaning making process not only for research purposes, but for the pedagogical significance and the possibilities it holds in teaching and learning with children.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE INQUIRY: THE METHODOLOGICAL STORY

> Understanding human experience is the central task of the educational researcher. For it is in the stories of everyday lives, the drama, the meanings, the metaphors others live by, that the human science researcher must practice his or her craft of telling.
>
> Valerie Polakow, 1985, p. 833.

This study was created as an attempt to understand the power of teachers' conversational storytelling experiences in providing pedagogical insights. The nature of the questions that opened and guided the study were a reflection of my deep interest in story and narrative, in pedagogy and in my world view as a teacher educator. They were questions concerning the qualities of teacher's pedagogical thinking, of their everyday classroom experiences and the meaning they gave to their own storied lives as well as to those of others.

Accordingly, the methodological approach to this inquiry needed to be one rooted not in scientific techniques of finding and proving facts but one rooted in the study of narrative, experience and meaning. Max van Manen (1990) describes the human sciences' approach to research in education as "the study of meaning: descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns,

structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meanings" (p. 181). And so, in an attempt to hold meaning at the centre of this research, I have undertaken a human science approach in this inquiry.

Within the context of human science I have focused on the use of narrative and story as a particular methodological device rather than a more traditional or straightforward approach because of its power to create meaning out of events and experience or, as Barthes (1980, p. 6) explains, "narrative ceaselessly substitutes meanings for the straightforward copy of the events to be recounted."

As a meaning-making method, story narrative is basic to this study of teacher's stories. Its importance lies in the notion that narrative is a way of thinking about knowing that is not only common to us all, but is what Richard Bauman (1986) calls a "cognitive instrument" for understanding experience. Moreover, narrative and story are essentially dialogical in nature, always seeking a response in others. Vancouver storyteller Mary Love May (1986) explains how "telling my own stories and hearing people's own life stories weaves mine together" (p. 14) in a way that brings a deeper meaning to her own storied life. It is this communicative aspect which allows the making of narrative to act as a making of meaning not only for those who tell, but also by those who listen (Genette, 1980; Ong, 1982; Rosen, 1986).

NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS METHOD

Narrative discourse, as a way of presenting research data, is not restricted to studies within the field of human science or even within other approaches within educational research. As I described more fully in the

previous chapter, story and narrative have long served as a valid methodological device in gathering and describing information in all forms of qualitative research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that narrative plays a very important role in qualitative research. "Because of its focus on experience and the qualities of life and education, narrative is situated in a matrix of qualitative research" (p. 3). However, for the purpose of this research I would like to point out a distinction between the use of story narrative in most qualitative research and the way I have used it in this study of teachers' stories. This distinction involves first, the ambiguity in the meaning of the words "story" and "narrative" and second, the ambiguity of whether these words are used in relationship to substance or method.

This is one of the complexities I have encountered in attempting to understand and use the terms "story" and "narrative" in the writing of this research and one I want to clarify at this time. I discovered, and most appropriately, that the etymological root of the words narrative and story come from the Greek word "struggle" and from the Latin word "to know". But coming to know through story narrative can mean viewing narrative as both phenomenon and method. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain that "Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study" (p. 2). They therefore use the term "story" to refer to phenomena and the term "narrative" to refer to inquiry.

Other scholars of narrative have described these distinctions between what might be called "substance" and "method" in different ways. Genette (1980) for example uses "story and narrative" for the text itself, for the

events presented. He uses the term "narrating" for the act of telling or producing of the narrative. Richard Bauman (1986) speaks of narratives in a similar way to Jakobson (1971) who suggests that narratives are "keyed both to the events in which they are told and to the events that they recount, toward narrative events and narrated events" (p. 2). Donald Polkinghorne (1988) says that "Narrative can refer to the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process — also called 'stories', 'tales', or 'histories' " (p. 13).

Within qualitative research, story narrative as an aspect of method is generally used more often as content or phenomenon for description and for reflection. Less often in research methodology is story narrative understood as the active process of ordering experience or the process of making the meaning. In this study, narrative as a process for teachers coming to know is as important an aspect of narrative as phenomenon. As I discussed earlier, much of the work on the subject of narrative discourse involves a strong emphasis on story and narrative as a way of knowing, as a way of making experience comprehensible. Polkinghorne (1988), describes narrative as a "way human beings give meaning to their experiences" (p. 11). Rosen repeatedly argues for narrative to find its rightful place in curriculum because of his commitment to the value of narrative as a major mode of thinking and a valid means of learning and developing linguistic competence.

In this study I have drawn on both functions of story narrative. I have focused jointly on the narrative events (story as phenomenon) and on the telling or the act of producing the phenomenon (the events narrated) to provide an integrated framework (Bauman 1986). However, the question

continually asked by narratologists, and posed by Rosen (1985) is "What does a narrator learn in the act of narrating" (p. 35)? This question is central to this study. I have used the term "story" to refer mainly to the content of the teachers' stories which have been excised from the flow of narrative statements embedded in the dialogue surrounding the stories or the events told. And I will use the term "narrative" interchangeably with "story" but I will use "narrative" mainly to discuss the language discourse used in the teachers' conversation. I have depended on context to avoid confusion for the reader.

The Power of Story in Narrative Inquiry

There are many reasons why narrative in the form of stories is an important way to shape and create a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world. One outstanding reason is that stories provide a concrete context for thinking and for reflection. Through our involvement with stories, real or imagined, we connect with people and events in a way that enables us to make experience intelligible. This is the basis of the method of this inquiry. Walter Benjamin explains that "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience — his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (cited in Polakow 1985, p. 830). This story narrative experience, when recreated in a meaning-making way, becomes an aesthetic way of knowing and a form of knowledge that is personally constructed by the knower.

Conversational stories or stories of personal experiences in everyday situations, like stories of fiction, have certain qualities that make them, in a

methodological sense, a powerful and "totally valid way of representing meaning" (Rosen, 1990). Embodied within all the literature on narrative are suggestions as to why stories are so powerful for the creation of meaning.

First, all forms of stories and storytelling are universal. We can't stop reading or telling each other stories. Stories everywhere are a basic form of entertainment and a basic form of the way we communicate with each other. As humans we have always used stories in these ways — from the days of early Greek culture to modern literature to present day stories in film and television. Ong (1982) describes narrative as paramount in not only oral cultures but also in cultures where high literacy and electronic information processing are central in people's lives.

We read stories made up by others and we make up stories about people we know, and about events that have already happened, or those that are yet to happen. We tell stories about ourselves, or as Genette (1980) says, "Everyday we are the subjects of narrative, if not heroes of a novel" (p. 230). Stories are multifunctional — there is not one single meaning.

Because stories are a form of discourse common to us all we not only engage in storymaking daily, but we usually know how to do it well. We have learned how to create stories by our years of experience from childhood to adulthood with this genre both in literature and in our personal lives. Meek, Warlow, and Barton (1977) describes what children learn from their early encounters with stories as "the templates, patterns, and symbolic outlines for their personal storymaking" (p. 74). Bruner (1986) says it is this previous experience that allows the listener to construct meaning as they listen and as they tell.

Second, stories reach out and draw us in. An announcement that a story is to come has a compelling effect on us to listen (Rosen, 1985). And if we think in terms of the work of Louise Rosenblatt we might say that in the midst of other kinds of discourse when a story emerges, the mind has a tendency to shift from an efferent stance toward the more aesthetic way of thinking or of perceiving a situation. Some of the world's greatest teachers have used storytelling as a vehicle for teaching because they know, not only how willing to listen people become when the mode of story is used, but they have discovered how much easier it is for a message to be understood in narrative story form. Egan (1989) speaks of "teachers as the tellers of our culture's tales" (p. 459). I would add parents and student teachers, who usually discover very early on in their relationships with children, that reading a story is an almost guaranteed time of quiet closeness and attention.

We are reminded that the compelling nature and the widespread use of narrative can also act to persuade or to manipulate in other ways. For example, advertisers are well aware of the power of story for commercial persuasion, and they depend on this seductive nature of story to engage the listener's attention long enough to be convinced that their product is superior. Politicians, theologians and other public speakers often lead their audience into their talk through story and then pull them back with another anecdote when they want to regain their attention.

Third, stories provide a concrete form for reflection. In both the telling and the listening, the storymaker contextualizes experiences by selecting and reshaping events and characters to make them whole and concrete. Story then allows us to objectify our experience. When we engage

with story in an open and reflective mode we find ourselves thinking about, not only the events and people in the story, but reflecting on these things in connection with our own lives. To reflect allows us to see things from a distance and in doing so, we are searching for some kind of order or meaning that will satisfy our desire to make sense of a situation.

If we reflect on the nature of story itself we become more aware of its strong memorable quality. We remember ideas and events more clearly when we remember the stories that were told surrounding them. If story is used as an example to illustrate a particular point we may remember the story more than the abstract point it illustrates. As James Britton (1990) suggests, the voices we hear in story narratives "may sometimes with some of us, outlive the ideas themselves as guides to action" (p. 61). Stories help us to reach back into our memories and lay open experiences we might otherwise leave buried or forgotten altogether. A phrase or a word may have a ripple effect on our thinking and set off a chain of associations that leads us to other stories, other times and other places. Story leads us to interpreting experience through remembering and through reflection.

Fourth, stories engage us in a very personal way. This is true for both the teller and the listener who, by strongly identifying with the people and the events in the story, vicariously enters the lifeworld of others. We learn to care about the characters; we care what happens to them and so we experience with them their laughter and their tears.

When we enter into a story in a personal way we can become so involved that temporarily we exchange places, experiencing the worlds, feelings and relationships of the story characters we meet or invent. Participating in a story in a personal way allows us to use story as a

sounding board to test out our hypotheses and our values. And as we become more aware of our own beliefs we become more aware of other possibilities, other choices to extend and create possible worlds. Another dimension of story involving us personally is an emotional dimension. Egan (1989) suggests that "stories work by embedding their contents into vivid events and images that carry strong emotional colouring." This emotional dimension helps to stimulate our imaginations, our creativity and our memories and to reinforce but also to refine and extend what Mezirow (1990) calls our "meaning perspectives". This blending of personal experiences and imaginative storying allows us to link a story with our own lives in a way that helps us to know not only the story, but ourselves and our own experiences in a different way. The effect might be thought of as seeing in a new and holistic way something we had been unaware of before.

And fifth, stories are powerfully social and dialogic in nature. It is difficult not to respond to a story in some way, and so hearing a story prompts us to engage in conversation with other people or even with ourselves. Stories can lead to a capacity for change. A greater degree of reflection and personal involvement in stories open up possibilities to move us toward change in our thinking and ultimately in the way we act. As we engage in storytelling, we reorganize the facts so that what has happened can become what might happen in the future. In this way, the stories we tell open up and extend new possibilities for experience (Rosen, 1985).

As we attend to the behaviour of the characters in stories we think about the way we might act in a similar situation and our attention may turn backwards toward the way we may have acted in the past. Alternatively, we may look forward to the way we could act differently. This

kind of reflective awareness, which Dillon (1988) says, is "also the heart of critical thinking" (p. 632) allows us to come to know possible choices and plants the idea in our minds of actually doing something else.

Finally, the power of story to transform our thinking as teachers and ultimately to prompt change in the way we behave with the children we teach, comes about as we learn to see beyond the story itself, and to link its meaning to the worlds of pedagogy.

CONVERSATION AS A WAY TO UNDERSTANDING

Within this study, narrative discourse in the form of conversation was fundamental to both the context of the stories and as a medium to guide the teachers toward understanding. Although at one point in the analysis the stories were isolated as a separate collection, it is important to "see" them in the context of the conversation that surrounded them; for the stories were embedded in, and frequently shaped by, the evolving conversations. They were, as Rosen (1985) says, not an "optional extra" apart from the conversation that was already going on, rather the teachers' stories were woven into the fabric of social conversations and emerged through the social experience of dialogue.

The use of narrative in the teachers' conversations as a mode of communication acted as a powerful means of bringing to a deeper level of understanding the meaning that the teachers were creating through their own narratives. Through the social experience of conversation, the teachers were responding to the dialogical nature of story itself. As I

pursued this inquiry, I was mindful of the nature of conversation as expressed by Gadamer.

Gadamer (1982) says that "conversation has a spirit of its own" (p. 345). He suggests that in a conversation we are not so much the leaders of the direction the conversation takes, but rather we are led by the object or topic itself. We do not always know the many different directions a conversation will take, nor how it will necessarily turn out. But we do know that conversations can be a hermeneutical process in which people grope toward making sense of a particular subject and to arrive at new and clearer understanding.

Gadamer (1982) describes what goes on in conversation as an "art of testing" which is the "art of questioning" (p. 330). He says that when we question we "lay open" or "place in the open", the topic we are discussing. For me, the critical word is "open" for in this study I was asking the teachers to openly make explicit their inner most feelings and to articulate the personal values they held in relationships with others. To articulate these things exposed not only what they did, but who they were. This "placing in the open" also implies evaluation of one's ideas through seeing our thoughts from another's point of view and re-presenting them to ourselves for reflection and interpretation.

In order for conversation to guide us toward understanding in a reciprocal relationship we must, as Gadamer suggests, keep in mind certain conditions. He says "the first condition of the art of conversation is to ensure that the other person is with us. ... It requires that one not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion" (p. 330). The way the teachers in this study engaged in

conversation and the different ways they used narrative to make sense together is discussed in Chapter Seven.

The Conversational Setting

The physical setting and the atmosphere in which the conversations and storytelling incidents took place made possible many of the features and conditions described earlier by Gadamer (1982) when he spoke of conversation.

The teachers brought with them to the gatherings a mood of anticipation, a desire to talk together as friends and a yearning to better understand what was going on in their classroom lives. At the same time, the informal physical surroundings of a home with a warm fireplace in the winter and facilities for sitting outdoors in the summer brought to the teachers a special human mood of quiet time, reflection and thoughtfulness.

The meetings began with an informal potluck supper to which each member of the group had contributed. The nature of the conversation during the meal proved to be very important in setting the tone of the evening. Not only sharing the food but sharing their experiences of having prepared it for each other frequently brought about stories of cooking successes and disasters. On more than one occasion, I was reminded of the relationship between the meaning of the word "camaraderie" and the word "food". It was during this meal time that personal stories of movies they had seen, books, hobbies, sports, possible career changes, romantic

relationships, happenings within their families and so on dominated the conversations.

The teachers had initially come together as strangers but gradually over the period of the research year I could see the development of very strong friendships. Even now as I write, these friendships are enacted in the teachers' continued efforts to meet regularly in each others' homes.

Through the sharing and accepting of each other's ideas within a very personal context they built a sense of trust among each other. This trust and belief in the other persons desire to understand what they were saying led them to, in Gadamer's (1982) words, "place in the open" their thoughts and feelings related to their professional lives as teachers. The quality of the interpersonal contact allowed them to enter safely into conversation, to ask honest questions and to maintain the reciprocal communication throughout the telling and listening to stories of classroom life. The turning on of the tape recorder after the mealtime signified for the group that the focus of the conversations was to shift from stories which centred on their personal lives to ones that related more specifically to their classroom lives. This transition from personal chit-chat to stories of teaching was not a difficult one for the teachers to make and it usually came about very naturally by the introduction of necessary instrumental matters.

First, there were always a few business items to draw to the teachers' attention. These included such things as directives from the university concerning their course credits; information for teacher researchers from their school district; and plans for future classroom intervisitations and meeting times and dates.

Second, the teachers usually had questions to ask me concerning the progress of the research itself. They wanted to know the kinds of things I was seeing at that point; how many tapes had been transcribed; when they could read some of the transcribed dialogue. At this time we often looked over the drafts of each others' stories and the ensuing conversation to ensure accuracy for me.

Third, there were many articles and books we were all reading, and so our comments which began this second part of the evening might begin here. For example, "Disposition to Learn" an article by Lilian Katz was among the ones that evoked the strongest response. A discussion of Katz's curriculum principles, for example, raised questions about the meaning of terms and classroom practices. Then the book **Dialogues with Children** (1984) by Gareth Matthews had been distributed among the group and discussion about this particular book occupied much of the initial meeting talk one evening. Several books by Frank Smith served as the basis of discussion, especially after his visit to Edmonton. One of the teachers who had attended his presentation shared her impression and her interpretation of his ideas.

Finally, the teacher's journal writing provided another way for entrance into the school related conversations. In the early stages the discussion about journals was mostly an attempt to clarify the purpose of keeping a journal, what was expected and how often the teachers felt they would use them. The journals for most of the teachers began as a note-making tool for recording observations and incidents. Gradually, as they wrote more thoughtfully and more critically, the journals became a valuable place for personal expression and reflection. While I responded to

the teachers' journal writing, later on the decision was made to exchange the journals with each other and to respond regularly to their colleague's ideas in written form.

My Role as Researcher

The question "What is your role as a researcher in this study?" has been one of the most common and, for me, one of the most thought provoking questions I have been asked since I began this research. What has been my function in planning, developing and carrying out the kind of study that involved a group of teacher researchers probing their teaching through conversational storytelling? What role did I play?

As I explored these questions I realized how the role I played was in many ways already determined by my purpose for the research and long before I began adding elements of methodological procedures. Comber (1988) points out "Inextricably bound up with the purposes of research are the appropriate roles for researchers within educational communities" (p. 782). As Comber suggests the purpose and the intent of this research, as well as the research questions, were certainly key in the part I took as researcher. But there was another equally strong factor involved in determining my role and the way I pursued this study. That was my knowledge and experience in working with teachers as learners, and my own knowledge of myself as a learner.

Because I equate research with learning and with discovering new insights, I was drawn toward an approach that I knew from past experience would be the most appropriate path to my own understanding of

the questions I was researching. I knew I wanted to be personally involved in a community of other learners where interaction, shared experiences and shared authority would predominate.

I wanted to be involved in a research study that would allow the whole experience to be, in Mooney's (1975) terms, "personally and scientifically rewarding" but also one that would allow the "pursuit of science and research with the acceptance and fruitful development of one's self" (p. 188). In other words, I wanted to enter into the teachers' classroom lives, into their interactions with children and others and to become personally touched by the process of growth and change. I saw the role I had envisioned for the teacher participants being one I wanted to share in because it would allow me to participate in the discussions from the inside, as well as to observe what I heard. I knew this expectation, however, meant that I needed to sort out my role as one of the group and my role as group leader. I decided to to try to do this by following some of Judith Newman's strategies in her work with teacher learners. I would attempt "to lead from behind" and whenever possible to resist telling the teachers what I know or think before they have had a chance to formulate their own questions (Newman 1990).

At first I was concerned about my double life as researcher and participant. Had I overstepped the boundaries of participant observer, a term so often used by researchers who enter the worlds of their informants? But I was clear that my role was to do everything I thought possible to help teachers know explicitly what they already knew implicitly, and to come to new insights that would not only validate their beliefs but held possibilities for what might come next.

I was aware of not only my responsibilities to myself as a person and researcher but of my responsibilities and commitment to this university dissertation. I knew the complexities and the multidimensional aspects of the task ahead and the risky challenge I had undertaken in continually balancing my personal involvement in the parts and my need to stand back and examine the research as a whole. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) speak of this dichotomy within the context of what they describe as "the multiple I's" in narrative inquiry. They suggest that the problem is not only one of a dual role but one of multiple roles — multiple selves involved in the task while at the same time one person. "The 'I' can speak as researcher, teacher, man or woman, commentator, research participant, narrative critic and as theory builder. Yet in living the narrative inquiry process, we are one person" (p.).

At the outset, I struggled with the word "role" itself because it posed images for me of a character pretending to be someone other than myself. I was reminded again of this idea while reading Alison Lurie's (1978) novel **Imaginary Friends** in which she said:

> I sometimes (though not often) hear social scientists talk about the effects of participant observation on the group studied — but never about the effects on the participant observer himself. Field procedure is based on the premise that you can do something over and over again without really doing it, without its really counting, because you are "just pretending" to be a member of the group under investigation (p. 276).

I knew from the beginning that if this research was to be successful, not only for the teachers but for me, that none of us could be allowed to "pretend" to be members. We were members. What I did as a member, what the teachers did as members, and how we behaved had to be appropriate to our commitment in the collaboration and the authenticity of the entire group. For unless an open relationship of honesty and trust in each other was established, little else of significance for this study was likely to happen. Hence, I saw one of my earliest responsibilities as a relational one. This meant taking the lead in creating an informal climate where expectations of collaboration among the group were established.

First, I wanted to dispel any notion of my role as that of authority or expert who intended to give step by step directions of how to tell a storied incident of classroom experience; nor did I want to evaluate a story as being a "good" story or not. I tried to do this by listening first and then showing the teachers through my own storytelling of incidents from my classroom and consulting experience that I was there as a colleague and fellow learner. During the meetings, however, I seldom allowed my stories to precede those of the teachers. I did not want to set the direction for the choice of incidents to be narrated but rather to use my storytelling to support and encourage them to keep going. At first, not all the teachers were comfortable with this shared authority approach. Some had come with the expectation that specific directions would be provided for the type of incidents to observe in their classrooms, what to write about in the journals and which stories to choose for telling in the group meetings. Gradually these responsibilities were accepted and owned by the teachers and in the end they all, in different ways, expressed a sense of satisfaction in being in

control of their own learning. One of the teachers wrote the following words in her journal as she reflected on her initial perception of my role: "I envisioned June's role as one of congnizant-guider, a transmitter of information who would guide me through this maze called teacher as researcher which I knew very little about. But I soon realized that the learning here was going to be self-directed rather than determined by an outside authority. We have now taken over that role ourselves."

I continued to participate in the discussions along with the teachers and tried to pose questions that might clarify a point by requesting more information, or to ask questions that might push us one step further in making connections, or in asking not only "what's next?" but "what could I have done differently?"

My role as enabler of teachers' voices being heard in the stories they were telling became clearer as time went on. I learned that leading from behind meant more than asking questions. It sometimes meant simply keeping the conversation going to enable the teachers to join in when they wanted to extend a particular idea or to respond to what had been said. Although the stories were decentered in the sense that they were about a variety of subjects, I continually and silently reminded myself of the purpose of our get-togethers. For on the one hand I wanted to maintain the intimacy in the relationships that had developed, yet I also wanted to resist any temptation that this group might turn into what Rosen called "a cozy confessional".

I have presented in the above how I perceived my role from my point of view as researcher in this study. But in keeping with the collaborative nature of the research I asked the teachers themselves to write about how

they perceived my role. How did they interpret my actions as researcher participant in the group? What follows are brief fragments selected from the teachers' journals which indicate some of their perceptions:

- you put our discussions at the meetings into perspective by sort of summing up with questions what we were saying.
- rather than only saying directly "do you mean" you used words like "I wonder if".
- you kept the ideas flowing among us.
- it seemed as if the knowledge or power was transferred back to us.
- I liked it when you were sometimes quite directive.
- you wrote in our journals but not always often enough.
- you were an encourager and kept us going to a place above our incidents.
- you learned with us... I like that... it was nonthreatening for me.
- a good hostess.
- a facilitator — enabler — stimulator — leader — support — audience for stories.
- a friend who gave validity to our ideas.
- co-ordinator.confidant.coach.collaborator.club member.
- organizer — brainstormer — agenda setter — mailperson — recorder.
- a colleague who understands the demands of teaching.
- someone who encouraged my own self-discovery of a strength I didn't know I had.

DATA SOURCES

While I used a number of different methods of gathering the data for this study, the major sources for determining how teachers' stories provided pedagogical insights were (1) the taped conversation and storytelling that went on at the meetings and (2) the taped conversations that went on in the individual interviews. Other sources included the following: (1) researcher's notes, (2) journal writing, (3) other writing and (4) observations of others.

Researcher's Notes

I kept notes during the meetings to record observations that might not be picked up on the audio tapes. Sometimes the background noise affected the recording, or a facial expression, a smile, a raised eyebrow were as important as the spoken words. For example, Amanda's eyes widened and her mouth literally fell open when Paige told her how she had thought very seriously about Amanda's comments about the amount of testing going on in school and how helpful this had been to her in a staff meeting this week. Then too, I jotted down ideas that flashed through my mind when something was said that triggered a thought or a question for me. For example, I recorded "they are all talking about memories of their own schooling — wonderful stories. Suggests possibilities for writing their autobiographies".

Journal Writing

The teachers kept their own journals throughout the research. They wrote down their critical incidents they observed and then later on they wrote more reflectively about their experiences. About the meetings one teacher wrote: "I'm finding the meetings are really good. When we share moments from the classroom I learn a lot of practical things too, and write them down to try with my kids." They wrote about their experiences learning outside of school. "In January I began a six week silversmithing course. The first night left me feeling frustrated, a failure and generally never wanting to silversmith again." And sometimes they wrote repeatedly about one child. "Here I go again with Timothy. But just when I think I have this child figured out he surprises me again."

Other Writing

Other writing included the letters we wrote to each other and the letters I wrote to interested educator friends who had asked me to share this research process as we went along. This correspondence served as a valuable data source for my "getting at the questions" as well as making explicit what I was seeing going on in the research.

The teachers wrote term papers as part of the requirements for university credit. These papers were filled with insights they had acquired during the research year.

Observations of Others

The teachers had all shared this research experience with their principals. For the most part the principals were very interested and supportive. The amount of interest varied. For instance, some of the principals talked regularly with the teachers about what they were seeing in their classroom and how these things related to what the teachers were learning through discussions at the meetings. Other principals, while they had agreed this project was a good idea, showed very little interest once it was under way. Those who were more closely involved with their teachers in this venture often shared with me their observations of the teachers' development. Apart from the ongoing collaborative checking of viewpoints among the teachers, Carol, a member of the group, but also another consultant, and I talked regularly about our perceptions and interpretations of many of the events.

THE STORY BEGINNINGS

The stories the teachers created and exchanged were narrative creations of the classroom incidents they had observed and selected for telling and retelling to each other. One of the strategies the teachers used to capture these significant moments is referred to in the literature as "critical incidents". Because this term does not carry one single meaning I will explain how I have used it in this study.

Critical Incidents

Brookfield (1990) describes critical incidents as "brief descriptions written by learners of significant events in their lives" (p. 179). He explains how "The educator using critical incidents gives learners a set of instructions that identifies the kind of incident to be described and asks for details of the time, place, and actors involved and the reasons why the event was so significant" (p. 179). Beginning with Flanagan (1954) who Brookfield credits with "the initial formulation of the method" (p. 179), he cites other educational researchers who have also used critical incidents. Critical incidents in these situations have been understood as a mechanical technique where the learner carries out the researcher's specific directions of what and how to observe and what to record. This is in sharp contrast to the way the teachers in this study have used this strategy.

For the purpose of this study, I have used "critical incidents" in a similar way to Judith Newman (1990). Describing in her work with teachers who are uncovering their assumptions of teaching and learning, she says:

> Exploring critical incidents has proven to be a useful way of learning more about my own teaching and for helping other teachers examine their instructional assumptions (p. 17).
>
> Critical incidents are those occurrences that let us see with new eyes some aspect of what we do. They make us aware of the beliefs and assumptions that underlie our instructional practices (p. 17).

And in a way similar to Newman, the only directions I gave to the teachers in using this strategy was to "bring a couple of short descriptions (either written or remembered) of incidents which caught [their] attention" either inside the classroom or outside the school altogether.

The teachers in this study attended to classroom events by first selecting certain recent incidents they had observed in their teaching. Second, they wrote the incident down in memo form or as a story narrative in their journal and third, they recalled certain classroom events of their own which were triggered by hearing the other teachers' narrative accounts. The stories told were mainly the recreation of a small event in which they were in some way personally involved. For instance, an individual story may have started with an observation made of something that happened or was said either inside their own classroom or outside the school altogether.

During the interviews, I asked the teachers how they went about selecting a specific incident and how they decided it was worth recording. While the reasons they gave varied in the one-on-one interview, when they came together, they agreed that all of these things applied to each one of them as well. They suggested that they were inclined to notice incidents within the realm of their special interests such as classroom reading and writing times or when children were involved in hands-on activities. They also mentioned how they noted things that they knew were important to them — how children were behaving and what they were saying. One teacher described how she went back to her classroom after the meetings and deliberately looked for events that had been suggested to her by one of the other teacher's stories. All of the teachers said they mainly noted

incidents that caught their attention, were out of the ordinary, something that surprised them because it was unexpected at that particular time.

Ashley and Amanda said they seemed to notice things children were doing on their own initiative, especially when they were unrelated to anything they had specifically taught. They cited the examples of children using building materials in interesting and imaginative ways and children making up their own stories for writing. Emma talked about how her attention was drawn to "comments from kids that I wouldn't usually hear." Paige was also conscious that many of the incidents she noted were tied in with conversations with children and parents. Helen said she found herself focusing on incidents involving one particular child and she recorded much of what he said and did. Katie remembered classroom incidents that she had written about in her journal and felt most of these were about situations surrounding her writing program.

The teachers all agreed that their skill in observing or seeing incidents going on around them became stronger. They became more aware of what was going on in their teaching. As Emma remarked, "Once you start looking it is amazing what you actually see that you hadn't noticed before."

The group recorded the incidents in different forms. Some teachers tape recorded or used small sticky notes to jot down brief memos and others wrote directly into a notebook or Journal. We talked about why they may have discarded some incidents they had noted and why they kept others to reshape into story form for retelling. There were, of course, incidents they had noted that on rereading did not hold any interest or desire for retelling

and those were discarded immediately. "Sometimes, I jot down something that later on I think is quite meaningless and so I just throw it out."

The general opinion of the group, however, was that even though they were not clear about the significance of a particular incident they had recorded, they had an intuitive sense that it was an interesting and important occurrence to share with others. This was the main reason for deciding an incident was story worthy in their eyes.

The following examples are some of the incidents the teachers selected and later recreated and verbalized in narrative story form:

- A child compares the class spelling bee to the way the soldiers fought in the Plains of Abraham.
- When the rules of a game were changed during gym class one of the boys became extremely upset.
- A group of students found a piece of art work belonging to another student crumpled up and lying in the garbage.
- A parent tells a teacher that the responsibility for her child's inattentiveness lies with the the teacher not the parent.
- A visiting speaker in the school tells the children he doesn't want them to ask questions or make comments about his presentation.
- A child announces to the teacher "I can read, I can read".
- During writing time one child chooses to write in his native language of Chinese rather than in English.
- Gordon, who usually is very enthusiastic about writing, decides one day he doesn't feel like writing any more.
- The teacher notices how one child continually talks out loud to herself while she is composing her stories for writing.

- The teacher discovers that some children are using concrete manipulative math materials quite differently than she had intended.
- A teacher becomes impatient waiting for a child to write down a guess of how many jelly beans in the jar competition.
- A parent tells a teacher that he feels that his child was learning far more in the classroom he was in the year before than he is this year.
- Although Jonathan is not a particularly bright or capable child, the teacher notices that he is giving other children a lot of help and encouragement.
- A teacher notices how one little girl attempts, for the first time, on her own, to print the letters she needs to write her own story.
- The teacher puts out a variety of materials for making things and discovers what happens when children are encouraged to create.
- A teacher feels threatened when a parent compares the work her child is doing in this class and work completed in another school
- A teacher overhears another staff member suggest that a particular child is either "not developmentally ready for school or is capable but lazy."
- A child writes in her journal about instances of incest going on at home.

SEEKING MEANING IN THE DATA

The most recurring data used in this research are the tape recorded narratives of the teachers' conversations during the meetings and in the interviews. The procedures the teachers and I followed in analysing this

data to determine how their stories and narratives provided insights included (1) an examination of the language resources the teachers used, (2) an examination of the way the stories were structured and (3) the extraction of theme statements.

The first task in analyzing the data was to create a written text from the spoken text recorded on the audio tapes. This text served as the basis for analysis of the stories and the embedding talk. By the end of the research year I had a collection of 42 tapes of teacher talk. Like researchers before me, I discovered that making a written transcription from so many tapes was not a simple task. For example, the ability to distinguish the teachers' voices one from another depended on my recognizing the tone, the rhythm and the pace of each person's voice. I felt grateful, more than once, for a sudden burst of laughter because the sound of laughter frequently proved to be a more recognizable individual trait than the spoken word. This was another reason it was important for me to know each teacher as intimately as possible before engaging in this task of transcribing. To avoid any misunderstanding, I continually shared the transcribed text with the teachers to verify that what I had written was indeed what they had said.

Like the teachers, my immediate response to seeing their words now in print was one of slight disappointment. Conversation, oral storytellings that had been so rich and so alive now, seemed lifeless without the rhythm, the patterns, and the intonation of the spoken voices. I wondered, as Hill (1990) did, if these stories really "could be captured on the page without lying there like mutes abandoned there by their parents." I was reminded too of another collector of tales, Dan Yashinsky (1990), who says, "Writing

down an oral story is a little like scoring a jazz improvization, the tune comes across, but the timeliness is lost."

Exploring the Teachers' Talk as Language for Learning

I examined the entire transcripts of the narrative discourse to see how the teachers used spoken language as a tool for learning. Apart from the constructing of stories, I was concerned with how they were learning by talking. What part did speech play in the process of the teachers' thinking and acquiring further insights into pedagogy? Within the story narratives and the interactions, I identified particular functions of language that revealed the teachers' active participation in the formulation of their own learning. I looked at the examples of talk in light of the language discourse theories of Britton (1972), Barnes (1985) and Polanyi (1985).

The following extract is included here in order to demonstrate the range of language strategies the teachers used to increase their understanding. This particular example was taken from the teachers' talk surrounding the first story told by Paige. She was describing a student-led class discussion that involved discriminatory actions by certain children toward the native children in the class.

Paige: The native boys had their hands up to answer the question, nobody else had a hand up, but the kids were not asking them. They did not see their hands, it was like they were not there.

Amanda: Is that attitude just with native kids or do you see that with other nationalities or ethnic groups as well?

Paige: I don't know. I don't have any others.

Carol: It is a kind of scapegoating. There is always going to be that one child that is different.

Paige: No, I don't think it's scapegoating.

Emma: I've seen this too... was much more subtle.

Helen: I've had native children in my class... never noticed any discrimination... but I have noticed it with another child who is behaviour disordered.

Amanda: I have a little girl who is Downes Syndrome... children will blame her.

Paige: But I don't agree that this attitude... is because they are different... when a well dressed "perfect" child joins the class... everyone picks her for their friend.

Amanda: Yes, but that's the point, native kids are usually visibly different.

Paige: Maybe the point is when the visible difference is okay... something they like.

Helen: I have a little girl in my class who is black and...

Carol: This conversation reminds me of a similar experience when I taught in a inner city school.

Amanda: It is as if there is a power thing at work... not only in racial situations, but one child controlling anyone who wants to be controlled, I guess.

Here, the teachers attempted to make sense of the situation presented by Paige by drawing on a variety of language resources. By using these

resources, the teachers showed how the learning extended beyond the teller of the story incident, to the full group. First, Amanda sought further information by questioning the specific target for discrimanatory behaviour. Amanda, Helen and Carol all identified with this situation by bringing in examples of other children's prejudicial attitudes toward a particular child. Identifying, in these ways, allowed the other teachers to think about their students and to understand their problems a little more clearly in light of the incident discussed here. Then, Carol explained and hypothesized that there are other possibilities such as "scapegoating". Similarly Amanda made a generalization from racial prejudice to the notion of power and control. One of the most important aspects of this discussion was that the teachers' thinking was stimulated toward the generation of other stories. Through the use of talk for learning, Paige concluded that children's discrimanatory attitudes are based not so much on the fact that one person is different from another, but on the kind of difference that exists.

Further discussion of how the teachers used a variety of language resources during the stories and the embedding talk is presented on page 206.

Finding the Stories in All the Talk

It was mainly the teachers' "stories" as a special form of narrative that I wanted to explore as a means of providing pedagogical insights. At this point I searched through the transcript of every meeting to find the parts of the narrative that I could disentangle or bracket off as a unit I

called "story". As I suggested earlier, I was viewing "story" as a narrative unit which is self contained in that it has within it a set of narrative statements of particular connected events that took place at a particular time; that had some kind of beginning point and proceeded to some kind of temporal closure (Chatman, 1975; Connelly and Clandinin,1990; Egan 1986; Polkinghorne 1988; Rosen 1985). Once the "stories" were elicited from the flow of conversational narrative, they were treated as separate units to be read, reflected on, and interpreted for meaning through the formulation of themes.

I selected eighteen stories out of a collection of over seventy-five. The stories were selected to reflect the teachers' interests and to represent a wide range of teaching and learning incidents, most frequently found in day-to-day classroom life.

Looking at Structure

As well as the pursuit of the "whatness" or the meaning of the teachers' stories through the analysis of themes, I continued the analysis with a view toward certain aspects of structure. For example, I explored the way the stories had been put together — the way the teachers had gone about selecting and ordering the events, and how they had revealed their style and voice through the use of different forms of discourse. I looked at the teachers' individual choices and arrangements of particular words and phrases. I discovered that the teachers' personal experience stories, like all stories, are framed within a certain structure, which on the one hand holds them together and at the same time sets them apart from other kinds

of narratives. I was concerned with how the teachers had gone about structuring or shaping the events they told as well as the commonalities and the differences in their stories.

Analysis of Themes

Analysis of themes was carried out first by the teachers on an individual basis and then as a collaborative activity when they came together as a group. We read and re-read the stories and wrote reflectively about them. The teachers shared their individual perceptions and interpretations in one-on-one meetings with me and then they engaged in collaborative discussions in order to arrive at further insights. We did not rigidly follow a specific technique or a mechanical device such as a computer program to do the theme analysis for us. Rather, we read and re-read the text as we entered into the written narratives. The teachers questioned and reflected on what each of their own stories meant for them as the narrator, both in the role of teller and listener. A sincere attempt was made to remain as open as possible to new meaning. The readerly approach to the text they had created held similarities to the way they might engage with a story from literature — a notion brought forth in conversation by one of the teachers herself. They tried to connect once again with the people, the situations and the feelings they had experienced in the telling and the listening to each other's stories. Moreover, they tried to approach the text as C.S. Lewis (1961) suggests, "with a fresh immersion in what it is" (p. 85).

Extracting the Themes

In order to arrive at the meaning of their own story narratives, the teachers used four basic steps as guidelines for extracting themes. These guidelines were adapted from the approach to theme analysis presented by Van Manen (1990). As a first step, the teachers read over the transcriptions of their narratives to get a feeling of what each storied event was about. As a result they arrived at a topic statement. (e.g. This story is about a parent's comments written to her child on a scroll hanging on the classroom wall.) Second, the teachers re-read the text, concentrating on each sentence in an attempt to identify significant words or phrases that revealed meaning. (e.g. rude; surprised; maybe this girl had some understanding of what her mother was about — after all it was **her** mother.) Third, they re-read the text and asked themselves "What is the message here for me?" Or, "What is this narrative telling me?" (e.g. As the girl's teacher, I felt badly but she seemed to take it in her stride.) And fourth, the teachers wrote a one sentence theme statement of the meaning they had made out of this particular narrative (e.g. A parent's and a teacher's way of relating to a child may be quite different, yet both very valid.)

The following extract is an example of how Amanda implemented this process of theme extraction in her third story.

Amanda's story three:

> This year I have a combined kindergarten and grade one. So, that means I have about half my ones from last year. It has been good knowing them well, especially when they first came in. It

> did help in social situations. But, on the other hand, this knowing them meant I had some pretty definite preconceived expectations of what they would be able to do in grade one, especially in writing. I assumed, for instance, that Cindy would be the first to start off printing letters and words on her own, to take risks and try new things, because that's what she did in kindergarten. Then, when I realized she wasn't doing any of those things, I felt really surprised, and disappointed too. Then about a week ago she called me over and said she wanted to share something she had written in her journal. I was so thrilled because this was the first time this whole year she had done something like that on her own. When I thought about this, I realized how closely she had been working with another little girl, named Rebecca, who was already reading and writing pretty well. So I started watching them when they worked together. Rebecca read a sentence to Cindy and Cindy wrote, and then Rebecca wrote and Cindy dictated to her. I am now noticing how much Cindy is helping Rebecca in lots of other ways. Here were two more children that were learning from each other and without me!

First, Amanda read over her own story narrative and decided that it dealt with the topic of peer teaching, children learning together as a community of learners. Second, as she concentrated on one sentence at a time, she identified the following words and phrases, "how closely she had been working with another little girl"; "to share something she had written"; "done something... on her own"; "worked together"; "helping";

"learning from each other"; and "without me". Third, Amanda felt this narrative was telling her in a confirming way, that children really do learn and develop skills by working closely with their peers in an interactive and cooperative environment. And fourth, she synthesized these thoughts as she formulated a one sentence theme statement. "The teacher is not the only resource for children's learning in the classroom."

As researcher, I was concerned not only in the thematic meaning that each teacher gave to her storied incidents, but in the variety of themes that were formulated from the wide range of different stories. And so, while I engaged collaboratively with the group in discussions about the themes, I also reflected on the pedagogical significance of these themes for a broader audience. I have presented my reflections in an interpretive discussion (Chapter Seven, page 217) concerning the teachers' stories and themes in relationship to certain principles of pedagogy.

CHAPTER 5

THE TEACHERS' STORIES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

> To grasp consciously the story one is trying to live out at this stage of one's life, is to cast an illuminating light over one's whole past. How did one come to this story?
>
> Michael Novak, 1978, p. 64.

This chapter is the story of the six teacher participants who, for more than a year, deliberately came together in an attempt to deepen their understanding of the "stories" they were living out within their own classrooms.

All of the six teachers who participated in this research "story" held teaching positions within the same school district. They were all primary teachers, and were all women, but each teacher came to this study of storying as meaning making with a different background and with a different number of years of teaching experience. Their experience in teaching ranged from one year to eighteen and their ages varied from mid twenties to early forties.

The opportunity for the teachers to receive university credits for their involvement in this study was made possible through the assistance of a professor in elementary education at the University of Alberta. The professor attended the first group meeting to explain the particular

requirements that would be necessary for these credits and to let the teachers know she would be available to help them in matters concerning the university procedures and requirements.

Not all of the teachers wanted to use this experience as a university course equivalent and so two of the six teachers did not register. However, the commitment to attend regularly, and to participate in discussion and to learn was very strongly stated by all. Some of the teachers who did write about their experiences as teacher researchers chose to have their articles published in a variety of educational newsletters and journals.

NARRATIVE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In recent years, studies in the area of narrative and autobiography as a means of understanding the nature of teachers' personal knowledge and their lives as classroom practitioners have greatly increased (Birren, 1987; Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin and Connelly, 1986; Raymond, Butt and Townsend, 1989). With this renewed interest in story and narrative as methodology in self discovery, current research has revealed the important function that writing stories of our lives can have, not only in understanding who we are now, but in "offering us some guidelines for the future" (Novak, 1978, p. 64).

In writing the stories of our lives we are writing our own narratives of experiences. At the same time, we are also drawing on our narrative competence as we remember images of certain people, what they looked like, the feelings we associate with those people and with the situations that

surrounded them. We reflect on the meanings these memories had for us then and now.

Raymond, Butt and Townsend (1989) in their work in autobiographical methods in teacher development say that, "Teachers' stories clearly illuminate the way that teachers' early personal experiences and personal development have a profound influence on who they are and who they become as teachers" (p. 23). Similarly in discussing the importance for teachers to take time to think about their teaching, Maxine Greene (1984) points out that "to reach back even for a moment into our life stories may be to find the sources of our craft" (p. 58). In other words, if we think carefully about our teaching, we may discover that many of the things we do and the ways we act with children are influenced by our past experiences, the things we believe in and the people we have met during our lifetime.

During the research year, on several occasions, the teachers agreed that there were many people that they had met in their lives who had strongly influenced their beliefs and their actions as teachers. The teachers found that some of the people that influenced them the most were the teachers they had known. They also realized how much they had been, and still are, affected and shaped by people in their families and situations outside their lives at school.

I asked the six teachers to select some of the narrative accounts that they felt told part of the story of their own lives. They all began with a narrative of present experience — where they are teaching now and how they academically prepared themselves for this vocation. The autobiographical episodes that flowed from that beginning point, however,

followed very different pathways. The episodes, in Novak's words, zig-zagged, leaping backwards and ahead and shifting in perceptions and purpose (1978). Yet, all the events the teachers described are like mirrors that reflect images of who they were at other times, in other situations. They speak of their experiences as children in school who worried about not "getting things right" and about who they were as children in relation to other people such as teachers, parents and sisters. Within these brief self selected story narratives, the teachers also express hope and joy in being with the children they are now teaching and they reveal a strong desire to influence these children in a pedagogical manner.

Emma

> I have been teaching elementary school for over 18 years now, mostly grades two and three, and nearly all of that time in one school. I went to University here in Edmonton for my BEd degree, but I haven't really returned to take any graduate courses. I don't think I have the confidence to go back to University, but now I feel the need to update myself, theory-wise.
>
> I love teaching and working with kids. I think I wanted to be a teacher ever since I was a child in grade two. We had a boarder in our house in Nova Scotia who was a grade one teacher. Night after night I would visit her room where she would allow me to help her "mark" papers. I felt really important and thought "this is fun!" Little did I know then that marking papers was not what teaching was about.

A lot of my school years I remember with great apprehension. A feeling of unease and dread preceded many school days. Questions such as "what if I don't know the answer", often were foremost in my mind as I went to class. The idea that I could take a chance and be wrong, but at least try, was not one that I was familiar with. The expectation was that I had to do everything right the first time and I should know all the answers.

I can never recall being reflective as a child but that probably has a lot to do with my family background. We were discouraged from asking questions, or thinking much, so I didn't ask myself questions. I can trace my inability to being reflective to my childhood where so many things are shaped and I regret it. I wish I could say to my parents, "Why did you do that?" They didn't intentionally set out to do that, it was what they thought was best at the time. Even in an internal sense it was forbidden. So I didn't attempt it.

Then as I grew older I saw certain things in my parents and as they grew older I realized "Oh, that's why they did this and that's why I think the way I do." My great revelation was getting married to a man who let me step back and say "Can't you see this?" My personality changed after I was married. He is more reflective and came from a family where he was encouraged to question, to confront and to be everything I was not allowed to be. For me, it has been a wonderful learning experience. I still find it difficult to be

reflective in some situations though. It is a whole pattern of life that you can't easily or automatically change.

Thinking about this I realize, however, that I do want my students to be reflective, to feel free to question and to try out unfamiliar things. I want them to feel confident in themselves, to take risks.

As I've grown in my knowing about what I want to achieve with students, I know I want all the things for them that I have not experienced as a student myself. For example, I want a sensitive, caring environment, a place where they are listened to in a calm responsive manner. I want a place where negatives aren't emphasized and a place where students can work both alone and in the company of others.

Amanda

This is the beginning of my second year as a teacher. I graduated from University of Alberta with a BEd in reading, and later qualified for a certificate in early childhood. My first year teaching was really a bit of a blur in my memory. I sometimes felt I hadn't a clue about what was happening or exactly what I was to do with all these children. It all seemed so different from the university practicum experience, or the year I spent working in day-care. I was glad I had courses in university that forced me to observe

kids really closely because I think they helped me to notice little things with the kids I'm teaching now. Both my parents are also educators and they have helped and supported me since day one.

My first year was a difficult one because I was in one school until Christmas in a team teaching arrangement, and then in January I went to a new school. The team teaching was not a good experience because the other teacher and I had very different views on working with children.

When I was a child in kindergarten, I remember walking to school many mornings with my older sister who would ride her bike along side of me. I have sketchy memories of the year in kindergarten but I do remember one incident that caused me a lot of tears. The teacher simply announced to the class that we would be drawing a picture of a snowman the next day. I was panic stricken. I can still feel that sick feeling in my stomach. I didn't know how to draw a snowman and I worried that I might do it all wrong and then what would happen to me.

Sometimes I find myself thinking about my grade three teacher. My experience in her class was a good one. She moved away, but for the next several years we corresponded regularly. She wrote to tell me about her wedding, her new house, and the children she was teaching. Thinking back about Miss Wright, I realize that it was not her method of teaching in the classroom,

or how knowledgeable she was in her field. It was the person that she was, and her interest and caring about me — Amanda.

Ever since I was a young child I have spent a great deal of time thinking, reflecting, and observing other people. When I was about eleven years old, I used to take the bus alone downtown so I could observe all the people on the bus. Like Harriet the Spy, I sat and watched people chatting with each other, I wondered what they were saying, I noticed what they were wearing and I wondered who they were and where they were going.

My memories of school overall were not very happy ones. I always seem to be facing a struggle or a worry. I was thrilled to finish high school — thank goodness those days were over I thought. While most of my friends went on the university, I decided to take an office job instead. It wasn't until four years later that I had the desire and the confidence to go to university.

Paige

I attended school in Edmonton from grade one to my graduation from the University of Alberta. I took summer classes during high school in order to graduate with my matriculation in two and a half years. I admit I was in a hurry to get out of school and into the real and much more

interesting world of work. I worked my way up as a bank employee for four years until discovering that in order to go any further I would require more schooling. At that point I examined several post-secondary options and decided to get out of banking and into teaching. During my junior and senior high school years I had thought of becoming a French and phys. ed. teacher because those were my best subjects, but so many years later I found myself interested in elementary education. I minored in reading and due to circumstances I did both my teaching practicums in grade two classes. I particularly enjoyed my one school experience because of the warm school climate. Neither of the practicum experiences left me feeling prepared for the actuality of teaching or any more aware of the age group I would like to teach. I was fortunate in being hired by an Edmonton school board, straight out of university to teach a grade one class for the remainder of the school year. I felt very unprepared for this, but I was reassured by my sister, a teacher, who said "University can't teach you everything about teaching. You have to do it. You can do it! I also got a lot of help from a fellow teacher during that assignment and managed to continue to the end of the year. The following September I was to begin a one year internship with a grade two teacher, but was offered a grade one teaching position just prior to school opening. That's when I started to feel like a "real" teacher. I've been a grade one teacher with the same school district for five years now.

As a beginning teacher, I was so busy trying to get the job done — teaching the curriculum, writing newsletters and all that, that I didn't really listen to the children. I didn't or I couldn't get to know them as individuals. With more experience now, I find that I not only listen more to the children but that what they say has more meaning to me. I have come to realize how much and how clearly children reveal "their learning" in what they say and do. For instance as one little boy exclaimed "I can read now! I don't know how I did it, but I can!" and when after listening to an interesting story about a visit to a farm, Jason wrote about his imaginary trip to the farm. I didn't really know where to begin or to end my teaching with the children until I had this understanding.

As I gain experience working with children, I can also see more clearly how environmental factors outside the classroom affect children's in-school learning. In particular, I'm more aware of how parents' attitudes affect their children's interest, motivation, behavior, self esteem and sense of responsibility for their overall involvement in the classroom.

Since I began teaching I've come to recognize that graduating from university and being a certified teacher is not an end in itself, but a beginning stepping stone in the journey of becoming — personally and professionally. I have also come to realize that much of the information I acquired during teacher training did not translate into true

understanding and awareness until I began to use it and reflect on it.

I do a lot of running, reading and thinking. I've used journal writing for my own learning. I enjoy learning for my own sake or for learning's sake. Unfortunately, this is something which I feel was "schooled out of me" in my early years as grades and teacher expectations usually stood in the way. I'm becoming increasingly aware of all of this for my students' writing and I try to give them safe and self rewarding opportunities to learn.

Ashley

I'm the only teacher in the group who went to university (B.A., BEd) in another city (University of Calgary). Last year was my first year teaching in an Edmonton school. This year, I feel more confident partly because I received my continuous contract. So, I don't have to think of the principal coming in to observe and evaluate me. Another reason that I feel better this year is that during the first few months last year I was a supply teacher and then taught in two different schools.

Although I was born in the USA, I've lived most of my life in Alberta. I grew up with three sisters who still remind me of our childhood and the adventures we got into. Even now, as adults we have a riot when we get together. We all talk at once.

I have a vivid memory of my grade one teacher especially during testing and printing time. One day we were busy practicing our lower case "b's". Our teacher had explained exactly where to place the letter "b" on the lined page. After I had printed several "b's" I felt really proud that I had made so many letters and that I knew what this symbol meant. At this point the teacher came to my desk, took her red pen and put a huge "X" through my two lines of "b's". Instead of making a ball and a stick, I was making them in one complete motion. I felt embarrassed and humiliated. Instead of feeling proud and good about myself, I felt unworthy and inept. Now as a teacher I remember this incident when I'm working with children who are learning to make letters.

When I was younger I took English horseback riding lessons and rode competitively as well. My teacher, Mrs. Obertos, raised my self confidence and encouraged me to enter more difficult competitions. Looking back now, I think the way she empowered me was through her sense of humour and her obvious confidence in me. If I fell off my horse she would simply scold the horse in a gentle way. Her laughter and her ability to make me laugh made me more relaxed and more self-assured.

I find a lot of amusing incidents go on in the classroom with young children. We do a lot of laughing. The other day the children had been

looking at picture books and I wanted them to change activities. I casually announced, "I'd like everyone to put their books up now." Almost immediately, several children raised their books high above their heads and waited for further instructions. I must admit I was rather amused as well as surprised to realize once again how literally young children often interpret what we say.

Katie

This is my sixteenth year as a teacher in elementary schools. I was on leave last year to complete my masters degree in language arts. My study was in the area of children's oral language in the composing process of sixth grade children. This year I am on maternity leave. My husband is also a teacher and I've learned so much from him.

Before I went to school I spent a year travelling with my father on his farm calls. At his office I had my own drawer of "important papers" and felt very proud and grown-up. As I think of this now I realize how this prereading activity helped me to begin using books, papers and pencils.

My mother was a teacher and I spent lots of after school time in her classroom. It seemed natural that I would become a teacher when I grew up. My father took university courses all during my

childhood and was always excited about what he learned. I felt this same excitement when I attended graduate school two or three years ago.

We are what we teach. I believe this and think that my parents and the small town that I grew up in made me what I am. I was taught to question — to search until I understood. Although my brother and sisters often obtained much higher marks in school than I did, I think I am an emphathetic teacher because I understand the difficulties children can have. I also understand the feelings which accompany struggles.

As a teacher today I am careful to avoid making comparisons between siblings. When asked by Mrs. A. if I was Jack's sister, I reluctantly said I was. I knew the implication of the question: Jack's marks were very high and I knew I could never attain such marks. The feelings that surround these memories are negative, even twenty-five years later.

I often share stories with my class — stories I have written in my personal journal. For example, I might share an experience about going to our cottage, to our treehouse and about the birds we saw there and how we felt when seeing so many birds. I tell my students about so many things I have learned from my husband. I describe our treehouse where we read and walk

and write a lot. One thing I learned recently was like a thunderbolt for me. I learned the sound that swans make and I didn't even know before that swans make any sound. They are mournful, not like geese. Whereas the goose honks, the swan song is like the top note that a goose has. I didn't know this before. We've had swans out there for two or three years but I never heard them, nor seen them. It was amazing how they found the only bit of open water in the whole lake.

Helen

I have always lived in Edmonton. I've been teaching for three years now since I graduated from the University of Alberta with an Early Childhood minor. I began teaching with rather interesting assignments. I was half time in kindergarten and half time in a grade five and six classroom. The thought of teaching a five/six was terrifying. How would I teach without play and centres? The children were so big! They seemed so old! Over the year, we 'stumbled' along, with my learning to listen to them, to plan from their needs and to realize they were kids just like the kindergarten. During my second year of teaching I began a graduate diploma in school libraries, taking evening and special session courses. This stemmed from my interest in children's literature.

I think my first two years were mainly 'coping' day to day. Learning, for me was taking place but I was not fully aware of the knowledge I was gaining — the links to theory and what I had

learned in university. I did learn to relax a little though, during that first year, and just enjoyed the children. What really stands out in my mind of that year is the children — how unique each one was — their personalities and special qualities. I probably think more about the older children I taught because during that year I felt they needed more of me than the kindergarten children. And as I stumbled along, often using kindergarten cues, they laughed with me and made me laugh. I guess I felt as though the students valued me — and I enjoyed them. Teaching was fun but tiring.

I feel I've learned a lot about teaching since I began. I've had experiences as a teacher librarian, experiences working with some very committed parents and wonderful working arrangements with very supportive colleagues and administrators. I think I have benefited greatly and learned from working with very enthusiastic, committed and reflective teachers. They shared, influenced and modelled. They really helped me cope and grow. Besides planning for various grade levels, individual needs and curriculum levels an added challenge for me has been that of working with several English as second language students in both classrooms. It was two years of growth, learning and coping for me — living day by day!

I am the youngest in my family of three girls and my parents are both in education. They have given me a lot of support and guidance, especially during my first year. My mother comes from a

very strong traditional Ukrainian family and these customs and beliefs have become very much part of my whole value system. It has given me a sense of value and importance of other cultures, especially in the classroom.

My father comes to visit my classroom at least once a year. He says he likes being with the children. Last year he came unexpectedly and the kids were so surprised. They expected "an old man with a cane" they told me. When one of the children asked if he was my father another boy said "Oh no, he couldn't be her father, he is much too young." My parents' love of teaching and children was a strong influence on me. They have both always shown enthusiasm, commitment in various challenges or endeavors and shared with us what they were doing. My parents have modelled a love of learning-enjoyment. They helped me question myself — what I think and feel.

Looking back at my own school years, the second grade is probably one of the happiest and most memorable for me mainly because of the teacher. On the first day of school, Miss Marion told us about herself, about her family and asked us about our families. She shared stories of her personal life and her sense of humour, and encouraged us to share our stories and to laugh. She seemed to understand me. Isn't it strange — even though my parents were teachers, I didn't think of my teachers as 'real' people! — with homes, families, or a life outside of school. My printing was not perfect, but it was accepted. Stitching could be

become very frustrating, but with help it was made easier and working with a friend was always wonderful.

Last January, I began a six week silversmithing course. The first night of the class left me feeling frustrated, a failure and generally never wanting to silversmith again. I began that evening with the vision of the beautiful creative silver "masterpieces" I would create in the following weeks. The instructor began by giving an overview of silversmithing and "the tools of the trade". After etching my design on the silver, I was ready to saw. This proved to be more frustrating than the planning. While my classmates busily sawed away, my blade broke several times. The saw was also awkward. How was I to saw a curve with this thing? What was I doing wrong? Why was no one else experiencing these problems? I felt like crying, I hated silversmithing. My enthusiasm for silversmithing and the visions of beautiful creative silver jewellery had diminished. I found myself thinking of one of my students who had entered our classroom in September, eager and enthusiastic to become a reader and writer. But as time went on, his confidence began to diminish. I wondered if he was viewing others' success compared to his own progress — and his early expectations of grade one. I sat with him and guided him through the particular project. I hadn't forgotten my recent silversmithing experience.

Another important member of our group was Carol, a language arts consultant and colleague of mine who has been involved in this teacher-researcher project since it began.

Carol brought to the group a wealth of experience in teaching young children. She has a strong background not only in language arts but in early childhood and teacher education as well. Carol added a supportive and insightful dimension to the storytelling and the dialogue among the group. On many occasions, Carol offered me her interpretive and reflective thinking about the teachers' stories in light of possible pedagogical insights.

Harold Rosen (1988b) says that "Nowhere are memory and narrative more closely intertwined than in the autobiographical story, ... in the story which insinuates itself into conversation, which is tendered as a fully valid contribution to that conversation, in pursuit of its evident intents" (p. 197). The teachers in this study did not come together for the deliberate purpose of telling autobiographical stories. Instead, they came to engage in conversation, to tell stories of children learning, of their encounters with colleagues and parents and to tell stories of their own discoveries. Yet, during these conversations, stories of their personal lives, both past and present were interwoven among all the stories of teaching. In this way, all of the narrative accounts of their lifeworlds as teachers and social beings that they selected, narrated, and wrote about were in a sense autobiographical. The life stories told in this chapter are, in different ways, very strongly reflected in the teachers' storytelling voices which follow next.

CHAPTER 6

TEACHERS' STORIES AND MEANINGS

> To tell a story is to formulate an interlocking set of meanings; to listen to one is in its turn an active search for the teller's meaning via one's own; to retell a story is also to do just that because listening is a kind of retelling.
>
> Rosen, 1986, p. 231.

This chapter presents the teachers' stories in the context of excerpts from the surrounding conversation. The purpose of the chapter is to provide an interpretation of the participants' meaning of their own storied experiential accounts of classroom life. The meanfngs held by the teachers were arrived at through a collaborative process of discussion, reflective writing and the formulation of their own theme statements.

I have included examples of the teachers' reflections taken from their journal writing, as well as my own comments on their stories and meanings in light of the pedagogical insights

The following teacher's stories are transcripts of their oral storytelling:

EMMA'S STORIES

Following the supper talk, Emma a grade three teacher began the meeting by telling the other teachers about an incident that had happened recently while the students in her class were viewing a film in social studies.

Emma: Story One

Emma: Jeremy, you remember Jeremy, made a comment that seemed quite insightful for him and drew a parallel to something in the class that hadn't even occurred to me before. This comment again reminded me how thoughtful this student really is. Well, in social studies we were looking at a filmstrip of the English and French in battle formation on the Plains of Abraham. I pointed out to the students how the soldiers lined up in parallel lines opposite each other, fired their muskets then dropped to their knees to reload. Some of the students voiced the opinion that "this was sure a dumb way to fight." Jeremy, however, came up with a comment that the way they fought reminded him of how we have our spelling bees. When I asked him to explain further, he said that during spelling bees it made him feel nervous knowing his turn was coming up and maybe that's how the soldiers in the lines felt too. The only difference in his words was, "We don't die at the end of it."

Katie: What a comparison! Wow. I've seen a lot of spelling bees over the years but I've never thought of that myself.

Paige: What I want to know is, why do you have spelling bees at all?

Emma: Well, they're a way of drilling and practising words they need to know and the kids really like them. I always thought they enjoyed them. I've always had them as part of spelling for years.

June: Do any of the rest of you have spelling bees? No one?

Katie: Have you ever asked the kids how they feel about them? Maybe other kids don't really like them either.

Emma: No, not really, but I just might do that, cause we do have our class meeting times when we discuss issues and concerns and things.

Carol: Maybe you could take some of that discussion time and ask them how they all feel about spelling bees. See if any others think of them like this. What an interesting way, though, for a kid to look at things, it probably shows this child's ability to look at other things in life like this too.

Amanda: I always hated spelling bees when I was a kid and I still don't like giving kids competitive games even now as the teacher.

Emma: Yeah, I think I'll try asking the other students about it.

Theme: Even a bright and capable child can feel threatened and anxious as he or she anticipates a turn in a spelling bee.

Emma's Reflections

I hadn't realized how threatened Jeremy felt by this experience. Because he is such an able speller I never imagined that he would have felt this way about a game. I thought he would have viewed this exercise as fun or a challenge, but certainly not fear! If he feels this way, I wonder now how someone like Cathy is feeling who has considerably less skill. Is she experiencing a lot of stress or anxiety but yet has never expressed these feelings to me? This is sure an eye-opening event for me, and makes me think of how students might feel and respond to other things we do in class.

Comment

This incident raised for Emma and the other teachers the difficult question of how to create an activity that will challenge some children and not create undue stress for others. Although Emma was describing only one activity within her classroom, it ultimately served as a means for her to think about competition generally and its merit as a motivator for learning for all the children.

Telling a story that revolved around the subject of spelling bees triggered for the other teachers some unhappy memories of their own childhood experiences with competitive games. It was mainly their

response, however, that caused Emma to ask her other students for their opinions on this matter.

At a later meeting, Emma described some of the comments her students made about spelling bees. For instance, some expressed feelings of excitement and confidence because they "usually got the words right", while others worried that they would be embarrassed if they let the rest of the team down. They all, however, seemed to agree that the purpose of the spelling bee was worthwhile as a practice time and they wanted it to continue. But the students came up with suggestions for change. They decided on a new rule, one that involved permission for a team member to ask another for assistance during the game if needed.

Emma: Story Two

The telling of this story was prompted by the conversation going on during the meeting concerning the practice of having student teachers in the classroom. Emma had a student teacher in her classroom at this time.

Emma: I think when you have a student teacher, you miss your own students, your own class, after awhile. Like today, we had our class meeting with the whole group of students. It's a time we have to share bouquets and concerns. We sit in a circle on the floor and follow a fairly specific procedure. Instead of putting up their hands, if the kids want to say something they put their fingers on the floor and wait their turn. The students classify

their comments as being either beefs or bouquets. Today, when our student teacher was chairing one of these meetings, she asked the children how they thought she was doing. One little girl said, "You know Miss, we don't think there is hardly anything, not one thing wrong with you." It was a genuine complement to her. Then they did have some little suggestions to make to her and she responded to these well. But you know, I miss my class by having a student teacher, I still have to go in and have my fix everyday and be a little part of them. I mean, after all, this is my class, and I don't like being apart from them.

Amanda: I think that's a perfectly normal feeling. You get so attached to the kids you teach you'd probably feel you've abandoned them or something.

Emma: Yes you do. You don't feel as if you belong to them any more either.

Amanda: It must be an adjustment, though, to have someone you don't know come into your classroom for four or eight weeks.

Emma: It takes time to get to know someone — to get a feel for them and you either get a feeling you want to be around that person or not. I've never had apprehensive feelings about student teachers coming into my classroom, though, because if there are problems you can certainly work on these things together, depending on the amount of time you have. I try to give the

student teachers lots of examples of things that might work best and hope they go away with something of value.

Katie: Some student teachers feel their practicum is really excellent and others tell how their experience was so bad right from the beginning that they requested a change to a different classroom.

Emma: I really feel for those students. Going into a classroom is still the best learning opportunity for student teachers, but if they are not getting what they expected then maybe it is better if they change. I didn't know you could do that.

Amanda: I haven't been teaching long enough to have a student teacher, but I sometimes wonder if some classroom teachers don't resent having their students or routines disrupted.

Katie: I have real concerns about practicum. Its not a natural situation to be in, and there isn't any personality matching of the student with the cooperating teacher, and there should be.

Emma: I wonder if there is any way the university could do matching.

Katie: No, I don't think they could. It is difficult for the faculty consultant too. Sometimes the faculty consultant and the student teacher have to handle the way the cooperating teacher is teaching. In some cases there is no room for that student's own style or personality, and they have to just "go with it". They can have a bad student teaching experience and, yet, be very good in their own classroom.

Ashley: I'm trying to remember if there was much attempt to match personalities with the teacher and student when I did my practicum in Calgary.

Emma: I know as a cooperating teacher it wouldn't bother me if I were asked to write a short blurb on my philosophy and ideas of teaching and submit it with the application to take a student teacher.

Katie: Yes, but would teachers be honest. I can just picture someone writing "Yes, I'm a very strict, inflexible traditional teacher" (laughs). Student teaching isn't a two way street. The student can't criticize the cooperating teacher but the cooperating teacher sure can do this to any extent they want with the student. Student teachers should be able to say, "I feel uncomfortable with this or that." I wonder too, if some teachers take student teachers just for the money.

Emma: I don't know but I consider having a student teacher a big part of my own professional development. I want to help someone else get started. It makes me sit back too, and think about what works for me when I explain it to someone else. Some student teachers I've had have been uncomfortable working with kids in small groups and the noise level bothers them. My instructions to them were you have your own level of noise so work with what is right for you.

Amanda: I wish I had had that option when I was doing practicum. What a relief it would have been. When I think back to that experience, part of it was quite tense and part was, well, I guess not so bad. I gained more from other experiences than practicum, but there were certain things I took away now I think of it. I guess it was good in some ways.

Theme: Being a cooperating teacher involves giving up your own students for a while.

Emma's Reflections

I realize more and more how important these class meeting times are for kids to question and express their opinions about things, but each time I take a student teacher I still think of it as "giving up my class".

Comment

Through her students appreciative remarks to their student teacher, Emma is torn between wanting to be a cooperating teacher as part of her own professional development and handing over her students, even temporarily, to someone else. By telling the others about this incident, Emma is able to bring this dissonance into the open and to make these feelings explicit to herself. In so doing, she accepts the fact that to miss your own students is a natural part of sharing your class with another

person. And more importantly, she accepts the fact that these feelings are legitimate. At the same time, the discussion surrounding the telling allowed the other teachers to reflect on their own student teaching and to consider some of the other factors involved in the area of practicums generally.

Emma: Story three

The following story evolved from a conversation concerning parent interview sessions which were going on in most of the schools during this particular week.

Emma: Speaking of parent interviews, I had James and his mother in the other day. When they both sat down my first comments were about how well he was doing. James is a real class leader and has a lot of descriptive power. He just sat there and beamed hearing all this praise. Then I turned to him and asked how he thought he was doing and he agreed he thought he was doing just fine. Nothing was bothering him except that he wished I wouldn't keep on telling him not to write about the Nintendo games all the time. I explained to him that there were so many other things he might like to write about and share because he does all kinds of interesting things that the other kids would like to hear about. Then we talked about what he could work on to improve for next reporting time, and we worked out a plan. My question to him was "Could you work

on improving your writing and could you try to control your temper?" Because if things don't just go according to his scheme of things he will just blow. He will either leave the room or cry, so we wanted to work out a plan to control this. Then we got out the decision tree and tried to work out something. I mentioned the Nintendo game again. He turned to me and said, "You are really onto this, aren't you!" He really viewed this obviously as a putdown. All he could see was the negative aspects and not the way I was trying to direct him toward the positive. I don't understand this Nintendo game anyway, I don't know all the characters, I don't understand it.

Katie: What does his mother think? What did she say?

Emma: His mother agreed. She feels his time could be better spent than on the Nintendo and she qualifies the time on the video. But you see, he takes all those things he sees on the video and internalizes them and gets obsessed as he creates the game in his mind or acts it out. Everything he does is based on this game! His mother says he spends an hour a day and on weekends on these games. But he truly lives for it. Interviews with him are like talking to another adult. In no way is he a seven year old.

June: Have you ever talked to him about his opinions on other things going on around him, other than the Nintendo?

Emma: I've asked him and he says he doesn't have time to write, he is too busy thinking. He writes plays based on these Nintendo characters. I know these things come and go and I'm waiting for the next thing that will take this boy over.

Amanda: What I wonder is how do you get a kid off these things? And is it important to get them off? Does it matter?

Paige: I wonder if you should give the kids the topics to write about more often?

Ashley: Maybe this will die a natural death Emma, and he will get over it himself.

Emma: Well, I don't think so, he's in grade three. He even has Nintendo magazines and these are at a pretty high level. His mom is really aware of this and I think she is trying her best.

Katie: Do keep exposing him to other things, though?

Emma: He does have lots of other options. He goes to live theatre with his parents. I do give him options in his writing book. I'll write "Can you try this today? If you want to continue to write about your play please do this job first and try to separate the two."

Ashley Could you assign him more specific topics for writing?

Emma: That is something I don't do, I like to give them choices.

Katie: When he writes about those things, is it good writing?

Emma: I've tried these games myself and I'm not good at them. The kids are very good at them, they are successful and they know it. They know they can beat the score they made previously, but it is action and reaction. You don't have time to think, just react. Maybe that fits with his lack of control, his short temper.

Theme: I feel a sense of responsibility to change the direction this student is headed

Emma's Reflections

Helping students to define a personal goal and work toward it continues to be part of my teaching. I need to help them to do this at school because so many kids don't get any direction from home. But I wonder how I can get the students to see the goal setting as more than just my making negative comments about what needs improving. How can I help them view this process as a positive rather than as a negative step? Maybe this year I can start earlier and make it more of an ongoing part of their school year, rather than waiting until interview time. One thing I'm learning, though, is not to react so quickly to what students say, sometimes they are just egging you on to get a reaction.

Comment

Emma was taken by surprise at James' candid remarks in response to her request that he try to write about other subjects than Nintendo games. Taking her responsibility seriously to provide direction for this child, Emma was following her intuitive belief that pedagogy means more than teaching curriculum; it means guiding a child toward what an adult feels is right for that child. But she was also learning more about the contemporary worlds of children and how caught up they are in the appeal of video games and other forms of computerized technology that surround them. Emma's awareness that this child was immersed in a kind of learning that was outside the realm of her experience was somewhat frightening. Yet, this conversation with James opened new possibilities for strengthening the teacher-child relationship and to allow them to influence each other.

Amanda's Stories

The teachers have been discussing the merits of specialized programs available in their schools for children with particular needs. Amanda tells her story.

Amanda: Story One

Amanda: I came to the school I'm teaching in now in January, so it was really the middle of the school year. One of the first things I

was asked by the principal was to come up with children's names in the kindergarten who might be considered for the academic challenge program. I didn't know what to do. The names the previous teacher had put forth were children that she thought were reading well. I could agree that they were reading in a way, but I didn't think they were reading any better than any of the other kids. I mean, what constitutes reading at this level? Anyway, I think many of the same things that are done for academic challenge students in special classrooms could be done for these students right within their regular classroom. I don't like the idea of kids being pulled out. Some of the kids who are pulled out at year one or two are only out for half an hour a week, and I think they should be getting these same things in the regular classroom everyday. Maybe the older students are probably getting a bit more time when they are pulled out. I find, too, that these kids are tested, tested, tested and I don't think it is a good idea to keep testing kids all the time.

Paige: Well, what did you do?

Amanda: I let the principal know what I thought, but it is this testing that seems to be so important.

Carol: I know what you mean, I've found that kids who are identified too early for academic challenge are often later found to be just ordinary bright kids. But with the funding cutbacks, they will

just find ways that these kids will not qualify for some of the special programs.

Amanda: You know when I look at these tests, there is really nothing mind boggling about them. If the kids can read the questions they can usually answer them, but this doesn't mean they are brighter than all the others. I think we should give kids a chance to develop and they'll likely catch up later.

Carol: It makes you wonder where these programs come from, where do they originate?

Helen: I think the testing for academic challenge programs becomes a real status thing in the community. At least that's been my experience.

Theme: I'm unsure about the value for the children or even the purpose in repeatedly using standardized tests to assess children's progress.

Amanda's Reflections

I still don't understand so many of the things that are happening at school concerning children, funding, testing and so on. I hear other teachers suggesting that this child and that one should be tested for reading. What does that really tell us? If we know that a child is 5.6 in reading, what does that mean for me as the teacher? Do I push them if they

test one way or back off if they test another way? I wonder who decides these things? Who decides what is important and what isn't? I think I'm more influenced by what I see kids are doing or saying. For instance, lately I've noticed certain kids coming up to me with "Oh, I know this word", or "I can read this book" or "See what I've written." I think parents' comments can tell a lot too, like Mrs. S. who remarked last week that during the past month they had noticed how much their child had grown in her interest in wanting to read books at home.

Comment

This teacher's need to question the widespread use of standardized tests as the major means of measuring a child's growth is made explicit in this narrative account. The supportive remarks made by the other teachers reaffirm for her the assumption that test results can often influence the way we see the children we teach. She worries that this preconceived understanding of a child will close off other possibilities we might otherwise hold for children.

Amanda: Story two

Amanda began her second story by posing the question "Did you ever find that something you haven't even planned for kids turns out to be the best learning experience?"

Amanda: Well, this was something I hadn't planned or anticipated. We had been talking in class about building things such as sculptures and statues. There is a park near the school where there are a lot of ice sculptures on display most of the winter. The kids mostly live in this area so they are familiar with them. We talked about how different they all were, how they were made and how some were castles and others were figures of people and animals. I had a lot of craft materials on hand for making things, such as cones, pipe cleaners, boxes, milk cartons, wire hangers. We decided to use these materials and create our own buildings or figures or whatever they liked. I gave them a choice of working with a partner, in small groups, or on their own. Now some kids chose to work together and some worked by themselves and then joined other groups later and asked if they could help them. I watched as they worked, and as one child would do something I could hear another saying, "That gives me a great idea." The result was I have never seen the class work like this before. They didn't stop for over an hour. It was recess time and I couldn't get them to clean up. It was fascinating to watch them. You wouldn't believe what they came up with. One group working together had made a huge monstrosity of a castle by punching down a side of a box and then making a drawbridge. They made trap doors, windows and lots of detail in this fabulous creation. Anyway, the project ended by their going down to the art room to get blue coloured paper for the water underneath the drawbridge. I guess the thing was they were so turned on, so

excited. In fact one little boy was skipping along on his way to the art room singing, "This is great, this is just a great day." I felt really good to see him so happy and enthusiastic about what he was doing.

Ashley: You know this makes me think of something similar that happened in my classroom. The only difference was that I had planned something very specific and it was the kids who turned it into learning what they wanted to learn. I'd given them sorting materials in math — concrete shapes to classify. Instead of doing this, one little group of boys took the materials and created their own miniature hockey rink, using the shapes for the players and the audience. They were using specific colours to differentiate between the boys and the girls. They were even counting how many altogether, how many more of one than another and a lot of other math kinds of thinking. I guess we don't always have to design the game or the task to see if kids know certain skills.

Amanda: I guess if we watch what they are already doing we'll see they are, in their own way, doing some of the skills we're trying to teach them.

Ashley: Right. In this case, they were counting, doing patterns and sorting as well as working together co-operatively. Amazing! I've noticed before, though, that a lot of the incidents I've

recorded in my journal deal with the kind of incidental learning going on.

Amanda: Speaking of incidental learning, the same thing happened when I put out a set of magnets at the science centre. I suddenly thought, is there really any learning going on here? Then I overheard the kids' conversation and they were experimenting to find out what the magnets could, and could not, pick up and really asking each other good questions. I felt relieved and I realized I have to listen and wait and not be so quick to judge that there isn't anything of value going on.

June: I used to find in my classroom that often it wasn't until I stood back after school, or when I was away from the kids and reflected on some of the day's happenings, that I realized how much learning was actually going on.

Theme: Sometimes the most valuable learning for children is taking place when we think we are not teaching

Amanda's Reflections

As I think about these stories, I feel more confident in children's ability to learn even without the teacher's directions. It's amazing, too, how children whose attention span you think is so short can be intensely involved for long periods of time when it is something they want to do. I am planning more of this kind of learning as part of my program now. Makes

me think, too, of the article by Alexander on "What Children are Doing When They Create". I enjoyed reading that article and I agreed with what he was saying but it is very different when you actually see these things for yourself in your own classroom.

Comment

Clearly Amanda is feeling very good about something she organized for the children in her class. But she is also aware that it is the children who are actively involved in talking together, helping each other, imagining and going about creating their own works of art. She "feels" the power and the energy in the room as she sees children engaged in a project that is their's, one that they own, and so very much one they want to do. This was not the first of such projects that Amanda had set up for her students. But reflecting on the images of learning embedded within this story confirmed the theory she had heard and read from "experts" in terms of conditions conducive for learning.

It is interesting to note, too, that this story triggered another story for Ashley. But when she tells about a similar incident in her classroom, Ashley realizes, through Amanda's experience, that she might have gone about organizing her activity differently. Instead of assigning the children tasks and giving them specific directions about how to make the product, she now considers about handing over the ownership for this task to the child. Ashley is now open to new possibilities for trusting children to learn.

Amanda: Story Three

The teachers were in the midst of sharing the difficulties they experience when they do any writing themselves, especially in the area of facing a blank page or just getting started.

Amanda: This year I have a combined kindergarten and grade one. So, that means I have about half my ones from last year. It has been good knowing them well, especially when they first came in. It did help in social situations. But, on the other hand, this knowing them meant I had some pretty definite preconceived expectations of what they would be able to do in grade one, especially in writing. I assumed, for instance, that Cindy would be the first to start off printing letters and words on her own, to take risks and try new things, because that's what she did in kindergarten. Then, when I realized she wasn't doing any of those things, I felt really surprised, and disappointed too. Then about a week ago she called me over and said she wanted to share something she had written in her journal. I was so thrilled because this was the first time this whole year she had done something like that on her own. When I thought about this, I realized how closely she had been working with another little girl, named Rebecca, who was already reading and writing pretty well. So I started watching them when they worked together. Rebecca read a sentence to Cindy and Cindy wrote, and then Rebecca wrote and Cindy dictated to her. I am

now noticing how much Cindy is helping Rebecca in lots of other ways. Here were two more children that were learning from each other and without me!

Emma: Did you feel a bit left out?

Amanda: I guess if I'm honest I did at first, like, maybe, I'm not needed! No, seriously, I can see how peer teaching really works.

Paige: It does, peer teaching, I mean. The other day I let the kids go around the room to see how many things they could read — like charts, rules, posters, things like that. I sat back and thought when I was first teaching, I would have felt guilty at something like this, but now I can see how much they are learning when they help each other.

Amanda: Yes, and how much they listen to each other, that's what I notice. For instance, when I'm reading something, they listen, but if another child says, "I can read something", they all lean forward and really listen. I don't get that kind of attention.

Paige: I know, they are intrigued at how this other child can do that. They want to do it, too. Now, I feel relief that I'm not responsible for all the teaching.

Carol: Reminds me of a session I attended with Jane Hansen. She wrote the word responsibility on the chalk board and then

wrote response-ability. She asked us if we were allowing kids to develop the ability to respond to each other.

Katie: I like that. The quote that sticks in my mind is what Vygosky said. How does it go now? "What a child can do today with assistance, he or she can do tomorrow alone" something like that.

Amanda: I have the kids' desks in clusters of four but the two I mentioned working together aren't in the same cluster right now, but I think I'm going to put them together.

Theme: The teacher is not the only resource for children's learning in the classroom.

Amanda's Reflections

I've always talked about the term "peer teaching," and you hear and read this phrase all the time at university or in inservices, but like so many of these expressions it often didn't have a lot of meaning for me. I didn't seriously think about it, but I guess it's just kids learning from each other and it really works. I find now I deliberately think about this when I'm planning.

Comment

Once again, Amanda is showing us how the meaning of theoretical understandings needs to begin with the experience of practice. Or we are already acting long before we are aware of the theoretical stance that determines what we do. Instructional principles such as "peer teaching" or "collaborative learning" can only be understood at a surface level when they are learned apart from the concrete experience of seeing them in action. Amanda's written reflections clearly reveal how her observation of children working together in the classroom, and her narratively telling of it, brought to the whole group a clearer understanding of the significance of children growing within a community of learners.

PAIGE'S STORIES

Paige: Story One

One of the teachers is describing a particular urban school as having a large population of native children. This topic invites Paige to tell her story.

Paige: Speaking of native children, something I've noticed about native students in my class is the way some of the other students treat them. It's really awful. I have some native kids who are in the same foster homes. Some of the kids don't even "see them". It is as if they are not there. When the children sit

on the carpet together and read their stories they ask each other questions or they make comments about the writing. I noticed again today that when they were sitting there the native boys had their hands up to answer the question, nobody else had a hand up, but the kids were not asking them. They did not see their hands, it was like they were not there. I said to them "Choose someone now please" and they searched madly with their eyes, almost saying silently "Please someone else put up your hand." I couldn't believe this. Where do they get this attitude from and at such a young age, too? I couldn't believe what I was seeing as I watched. Of course, if anything goes wrong in the class or on the playground, they blame the native kids first. The other kids are now beginning to accept the first native boy in the class, but the second one who has just come in is having real trouble.

Amanda: Is that attitude just with native kids or do you see that with other nationalities or ethnic groups as well?

Paige: I don't know, I don't have any others.

Carol: It's a kind of scapegoating. There is always going to be that one child that is different in some way

Paige: No, I don't think it is scapegoating, it's the attitude of this whole class. This one little girl was looking right at both these little boys with their hands up and she took every other question and comment, and then she stopped taking questions

and said she was finished. But the two boys still had their hands up.

Emma: I've seen this too, but not quite so blatant. It was much more subtle.

Helen: I've had native children in my class and I've never noticed any discrimination by the other kids, but I have noticed it with another child who is behaviour disordered. He has improved since the beginning of the year, but he used to have to be removed physically at times. The other kids were like that with him, but as his behaviour is changing they are changing in their attitude toward him.

Amanda: I have a little girl who is a Downes Syndrome child, and I've found certain children will blame her for broken toys or things that are lost. For instance, one little boy was blaming her the other day and yet she had been away for two days. He is particularly quick to say, "Janice probably did it."

Paige: But I don't agree that this attitude toward certain kids is because they are different. I've noticed when a particularly attractive, well dressed "perfect" child joins the class, she is the center of attention and everyone picks her for their friend.

Amanda: Yes, but that's the point, native kids are usually visibly different.

Paige: Maybe the point is that when the visible difference is okay, when it is something they like, something positive, even though she's new, she is also white.

Carol: This conversation reminds me of a similar experience I had when I taught at an inner city school. There was a little girl named Kim. Her father was Chinese and her mother was English, and some of the kids in the classroom were not very positive towards her. They would make remarks and so on. She was a very quiet child and it was only as the year progressed that we began to talk more and more to Kim's parents and to other parents in the community. These parents saw each other at social functions, and it was here I saw that the parents of Kim were being treated in a similar manner. So prejudice was directed against the whole family. I realized that the kids at school were learning these attitudes from their parents. It was quite obvious that the other parents completely ignored Kim's parents and the kids were just following along.

Paige: It's sad, but what scares me is that these kids are going to grow up to be the parents.

Helen: I have a little girl in my class who is black and any time anything happens where she has a disagreement with another child and they say they don't want to work with her or be her partner, she will turn to them and say, "Is it because I'm black?" That's always her immediate response. Then after meeting her father and hearing about their experiences living

in New York, I could see how strongly this idea was coming across at home.

Emma: Don't you find it changes the whole tone of your class, the whole dynamics change so you end up having to deal with not just one child's problems but the whole group.

June: That's an interesting point, Emma, in a group situation, socially or culturally, we are never islands unto ourselves.

Amanda: It's as if there is a power thing at work. One child can influence others' attitudes and is controlling the others. I've seen this not only in racial situations, but one child controlling anyone who wants to be controlled, I guess. I have one little girl who seems to have this kind of power over other children in the class. Even at snack time some of the children will ask her if she thinks they should have this or that or where they should sit. When I see this happening I get so indignant, I have to jump right in — like today I said really firmly, "This is your snack, your choice, you decided if you want jello or not." I mean, this may sound like a not too serious thing, but some day the choice may be not whether to take jello or not, but whether to take drugs.

Theme: Sometimes even very young children show discrimination on the basis of appearance and social status.

Paige's Reflections

Thinking about the native children and the way the other kids treated them, it was so blatant, so obvious. I wonder now, though, if some of these same kids have been treating other kids in the same way, who aren't native or aren't visibly different. Maybe I've never noticed it before because they weren't native children.

Comment

Naturally, Paige was saddened by the way the children in her class were treating each other. We would be surprised if she had indicated otherwise. She was disappointed in seeing such discriminatory attitudes displayed in the actions of even very young children. But this storytelling event is an important example of the teachers' using narrative as a means to sort out and to make sense of incidents of prejudice going on right in their own classrooms.

And as the teachers shared their observations of similar actions the entire group realized that prejudice based on skin colour and cultural differences is only one context for discrimination. They began to think about examples of other kinds of differences among children that had caused problems in the way they acted toward one another. They were becoming more aware of the implications that discriminatory actions toward those in the minority have for placing constraints on the freedom of others. Even though the discussion did not deal openly with what they

could do as teachers to help or change these situations, their expanding awareness of these issues may have been the first step in a call to action.

Paige: Story Two

This week in most of the schools the teachers were carrying out scheduled parent interview meetings. Paige recounts a particular encounter with one child's parents.

Paige: My recent interviews with parents were really interesting, I mean a real experience. I have lots of kids who are having problems such as behaviour and otherwise. I actually felt like it was a real waste of time talking to these two particular parents. Their child is a very reactive student, for instance, he has poor self esteem. And he is forgetful, takes everything home and never remembers to bring anything back. His home reading book, for instance, is still at home. His parents didn't seem that concerned. You know what his mother suggested? That I keep track of his behaviours at school and then the parents would punish him at home. That's their idea of partnership. This would mean that I would be doing everything except the things that would really bring about change. I would just keep records and they would punish. I tried to suggest some positive things they might do, but they ignored this and said they weren't going to do anything. I could just keep on doing what I was doing because that, after

all, is my job, right! And they would keep on doing what they were doing because that is their job.

Emma: Reminds me of an interview I had with one of my student's mother last Friday. His mother just sits there and rolls her eyes, but I really enjoy that kid. Did you have the student sitting in on the conversation, Paige?

Paige: That's expected at our school when parents come for an interview. Then I have another child who is also not responsible for anything. I have to phone home looking for the interview schedule sheet. He is always off track, misses a lot of what is going on. He never finishes anything either. Of course in kindergarten they often don't have to finish anything. Then when they get into grade one they are shocked when they have to finish something. It was about the end of my third year of teaching that I realized this was my problem. I had never really told them my expectation of finishing anything. To start with, this mother didn't bring him to the interview. She hadn't even read his report card. She didn't want anything to do with this situation and she is a teacher, too.

Ashley: In my kindergarten we talk a lot about finishing things. It depends though on what it is. Maybe they want to finish it the next day.

Paige: "Finish it the next day", that is what they say because they want to go to centres.

Ashley: Well, of course, in kindergarten my kids are nearly always at the centres. I mean that's where they work. So if they are writing, say for twenty minutes and they've "had" it, they can go back to the writing the next day. Now, there is the centre called work jobs where they do have to finish that task.

Amanda: Paige, What kinds of things do you think are important for them to finish?

Paige: Well, a sheet of printing or an assignment.

Helen: Some of my kids have such problems with printing that they could sit there all day and they wouldn't finish. Kids work in different time zones.

Amanda: Right. I have some kids who can hardly get to school on time. They just wander in late even from recess. The same with printing. Some are very quick and others do one line and are absolutely exhausted.

Paige: I think you are missing the point. I'm talking about commitment to the task. I find that even at centres, if they are allowed, they just run from centre to centre.

Ashley: I think there is a particular mentality of grade one teachers. I find kindergarten teachers are getting a bad rap these days. I was talking with a teacher who changed from teaching kindergarten to grade one and another teacher said to her, "Oh, so you are now going to really learn something about teaching."

Emma: Do you think that attitude is because for so many years kindergarten was not a valid part of schooling.

June: I remember kindergarten teachers telling me how isolated they used to feel from the rest of a school staff. In some cases they weren't even included in staff meetings.

Ashley: You're kidding! I didn't know it was that bad.

Amanda: What I find interesting are the comments of the grade one teachers about what they expect from the kids coming out of kindergarten. I don't know why, maybe just for fun, but when I was teaching kindergarten I asked that question to the grade one teacher in the school I was in. Then when she said, "the alphabet, letter sounds, and so on," I just thought, well, good luck because I knew where my kids were at.

Paige: But Amanda, that grade one teacher hasn't taught kindergarten and doesn't have a good perspective on what is possible. That's something you have to see.

Helen: When I taught kindergarten I used to feel so depressed in September just thinking of starting all over again with a new group.

Emma: It's like that for a teacher in any grade.

Ashley: There always seems to be pressure and expectations from the teacher in the next grade. Kindergarten teachers feel this pressure from grade one teachers and on and on. But you feel

it from the parents too. I find the parents worry a lot about their child learning to read in grade one so they think that if they begin knowing the alphabet and letter sounds in kindergarten they will, at least, have a better chance.

Theme: The teacher's view of how parents can be partners with the teacher in their child's education may not always match the parent's view.

Paige's Reflections

Unfortunately it isn't unusual for some parents to book time to talk with me and not show. Where parent involvement is concerned at our school I have have seen a change this year. Things used to be pretty good in that area, but this year home and school relationships generally seem to be headed downhill. The community is changing, it's not as well off. This is a new experience for me this year, all round. Without parent involvement, school is a very isolated experience for a child, and school should not be this isolated experience but rather a part of a whole which involves home, school, community, life and everything.

Comment

Talking with these parents enabled Paige to see how they viewed their part in their child's schooling. It gave Paige the opportunity to see

how her expectations of the parents and their expectations of her, as the teacher, were vastly different. Obviously, the parents placed the responsibility for the development of their child's attitudes and character traits on the teacher and only agreed to support her by providing punishment at home. As Paige reflected on this situation, she understood the need for children to feel a connectedness between the two most influential places in a child's lifeworld -home and school. The point that teaching involves mediating not only teacher and parent relationships, but often mediating our own beliefs with another teacher's beliefs within the same school, was made explicit for all the other teachers as well.

Paige: Story Three

The topic of children learning to write was the focus of the teachers' supper time chit chat conversation this evening.

Paige: For the past few years, I have had a student-of-the-week program that basically celebrates one of the children each week. The class interviews the student and I have lunch with him or her and each of the children writes a page for a special book which is given to the student of the week. The children are then asked to write something kind or nice about the person — something they like about them or something they've enjoyed doing with him or her — something positive they've noticed. I haven't placed any time limits for completing the writing and there are always at least two adults to assist with spelling and so on. I consider it a relatively free writing time

in many respects. But the thing I noticed this week was a great improvement in most of the children's writing. That is, I mean, their ideas seemed to come more readily and they wrote more fluently with less adult coaching. The content of the writing was more personal. There seemed to be fewer generic statements such as "I like you because you are nice." The children's ideas were more diverse, more interesting. They had improved in the mechanics, too, but that wasn't what struck me. I enjoyed reading this writing, this student of the week book far more than I had other books done this year. There was nothing artificial about it.

Ashley: This would probably help the kids to know each other better too, when they have to think about another person and write something down.

Paige: It does. I'm curious to see what happens this week because I have a student who is really withdrawn and I don't know how well the rest of the students know him. It will be interesting to see if they have anything to say. Sometimes they make up something when they can't think of anything. Or one student might write "You have a good sense of humour" and then they all write that for every student of the week even if they don't really believe it.

Katie: You know what I would like is to see some of these little entries — what the kids wrote about. Bring some next time, Paige. Can you remember any of the comments?

Paige: Let's see. Oh, this child takes karate lessons and some of the kids thanked him in their letters for teaching them about karate and how to do all those moves. Others said they had a lot of fun at his birthday party playing certain games. Now I think of it, their comments about this kid were much more specific than comments they'd made about others. You can tell they know more about him or they cared more about this person.

Katie: Some kids are just easier to know than others — like all of us, I guess. Makes you think of the poor shy quiet ones that we have such a hard time to get to know and the other kids don't ever get to know them

Paige: Until I thought about this student-of-the-week activity, I hadn't thought about that and it's so obvious — but I didn't see it before.

Helen: There are other ways too that students can get to know each other better in the classroom. Like sharing books and talking and recommending books to each other. That gives us an idea of kids' interests — what they like.

Paige: Right, but it also makes me think of writing and that writing is so much easier when we really have something we want to say, not when we have to write and we feel we don't have anything to say about a topic. When we want to say something, writing isn't so painful. Makes me think about who should choose the topics for writing, the teacher or the kids?

Theme: Children can write creatively if given the opportunity to write about something that is important to them.

Paige's Reflections

So, what does all this mean? I know that in the past when I've seen changes or growth in the kids' writing, I've always attributed it to maturity. You know, after Christmas a lot of your teaching and the children's experiences mesh and fall into place. Or the children are simply more familiar and comfortable with writing. To some extent I still agree with this. But this time when I think about the growth I'm seeing in the kids' writing, I recognize there is more to it than that.

Then in turning to my own writing I see that mine too had more fluency and ease of expression. Obviously in my case it wasn't maturity or increased familiarity with the assignment. It was simply because I really had something to say to this particular child. His interview had been interesting and he is an interesting and easy person to know. So writing, to and about him, was very easy. I think the children's writing improved too because they also had something to say. I realize now that other times when they wrote these letters to each other it was because I insisted they do it. This time their writing suggested that they had meaning in their relationship with their fellow student. In other words, they didn't have to make it up. Retrospect is a great thing! I wonder in the weeks to come what direction their writing will take. I wonder if it will show continual growth. If I were ever teaching an older grade, I'd like to do this activity

with them because they would probably know each other better and have even more experience in writing.

Comment

By enthusiastically sharing this event about a writing project in her classroom, Paige discovers that she knows a great deal more than she had thought about the act of writing. She knows that becoming a writer involves more than simply carrying out a writing task. Her own reflections reveal how she is coming to know something of the relationship between writing reflectively and thinking. And how even for very young children who are still struggling with creating print, writing can begin to act in this very personal way. Paige has seen, too, that becoming a good writer is an on-going process that involves patience and time. And that it does matter what we write about, for whom and for what reason.

ASHLEY'S STORIES

The following story emerged during a discussion concerning teachers' tendency to hurry children rather than to give them sufficient time to answer a question or to say what they want to say.

Ashley: Story One

Ashley: I was really impatient with a particular child the other day. Sometimes it seems so long to wait for them to answer and, yet,

it is probably less than a minute, but I think I have to jump right in. Then last week during Hallowe'en we had a pumpkin contest in the school. There was a jar in the office filled with jelly beans — one of those guess how many jelly beans in the jar sort of thing. There were two contests — one for division one kids, and one for division two. I took my kindergarten class down to the office so they could write down their guesses on pieces of paper and put the paper in the jar. Each child had a slip of paper with a picture of the jar, a place to write their name, and a place for the number guessed. I found myself getting so impatient with the kids to hurry up. "Come on, come on," I kept thinking. "Oh for heavens sake, let's not take all day." One little boy looked up at me and I felt so badly because I knew I was being terribly impatient. I thought about my own patience and wondered just how patient a person am I? I don't know if I am patient enough in other areas too when it comes to the way children respond to me. I guess I really do expect a quick response, and I'm not sure I give them enough time to really formulate an answer properly before getting back to me. I think I'm probably inconsistent, sometimes I'm very patient and at other times I wonder about myself.

Amanda: I wouldn't feel too badly about that situation. We wouldn't be normal or human if we were perfect. Sometimes I think I got the impression at university that I had to be patient all the

time, never raise my voice or show irritation. And that's not normal.

Katie: Is it a matter of what is important? Maybe it's okay to be impatient with kids over some things.

Paige: I think when it is critical we probably come through and are patient.

Katie: Let's be practical. We have these classes and we always know we are responsible for so many children — so many things. We can only do the best we can. We all want to give more time, but it is hard. We know kids need time to think, but in a practical way it is sometimes difficult to allow enough time. Maybe the important thing we need to remember is that we are aware of this situation and aware of the need to try to allow time for important things.

Emma: I can relate to that. I know much more now what needs time, what needs to be covered. Take the social studies curriculum for instance, they give certain time periods in the teachers' guide. I often think, "No way! I will do this in the amount of time I feel is suitable," and I don't feel I have to justify this decision with anyone. I also take a lot more time now to talk with kids after recess too, and ask them about schoolyard experiences — that kind of thing.

Katie: I've noticed lately I feel more confident in saying "Yes, this does matter," and the students and I stop and talk about this. I honestly don't worry as much as I used to about "covering the

curriculum", I know we'll get the science done. I don't know when it was or how I got passed worrying about some of these things, but it is a real release when you can finally get past that stage.

Theme: I feel discouraged when I fall short of my own expectations of myself as a teacher.

Ashley's Reflections

Thinking about this Hallowe'en event, I wonder why I was so worried about being so patient in giving children time to respond to this activity. It's hard to be perfect all the time. I think giving children time is important but maybe not as necessary with this type of activity — this kind of situation. Maybe the kids were taking so long because they weren't really sure why I was making them to do such a task. Maybe some things are worth more time than others. Time needed for guessing the number of beans in a jar is quite a different thing than time needed for thoughtful discussions and probing questions.

Comment

Ashley and the other teachers are discovering that being a perfect teacher is as difficult as being a perfect human being. And because teaching is a human activity we are not always able to live up to the high expectations we set for ourselves. Yet, teaching within a pedagogical

relationship requires our continual striving toward being the kind of teacher and person we want to be.

This particular incident recounted by Ashley encourages the other teachers to think about the notion of patience. When is patience pedagogically essential and when is it not? They see too, how the reality of being with children on a daily basis is a continual test of this aspect of our patience.

Ashley: Story Two

Report card time and talking with parents about their children's progress in school evoked the teachers' thoughts about good things happening in their classrooms. Ashley tells her story of one child's achievement in writing.

Ashley: Connie, one of the little girls I was writing with the other day, was dictating some of the most wonderful stories to me and I wrote them down. She is a very descriptive writer; the events in her stories are long and very complex. They are really like fairy tales, you know. There are characters, setting and a problem to solve which always gets solved. They are just fantastic. The thing I noticed when she was making up her story and telling it to me was that she will stop, think, and say something like, "Oh, perhaps I should use this word now because I used another before." It is as if she is thinking out loud all the time, planning, more than the other children seem to do. I am wondering if there is a connection between her

thinking out loud and the wonderful stories she is creating. She seems to have a reason for what she does in her story telling. "I'll do this first because of that, and I'll do that because this happened." she explains. Her thinking seems so complex for her age and her stories are unbelievably great. I've shared some of her writings with other staff members and they just can't believe how creative they are

Carol: It is as if her talking is allowing you to get into her mind and see how she is going about her writing.

Paige: You say she is dictating and you are scribing. Has she tried to create her own print — make her own letters?

Ashley: Now this is interesting, because she doesn't want to do that. She is very curious but her own stories are too hard for her to get down. Her vocabulary is too big so she wants me to do the writing and she wants to do the dictating. Now in her journal writing she makes a picture and then writes a statement like "this is a pony" — no problem, and she reads too.

Paige: How old is she?

Ashley: Five. But she amazes me, and I think for her to try to write the stories she is telling would maybe not be a good thing right now.

Katie: Does she read the stories you write?

Ashley: Usually, I read them back to her because that is what she likes, you know. She listens and corrects me if I make a mistake or I'm thinking of something else. Or she'll say, "no lets change that word." Then she knows exactly where the word is located and she will erase it. There is one story about a snail who gets caught in the mud — it's amazing!

Katie: I bet this child has been read to a lot.

Ashley. Yes, a lot. I worry about her going into grade one next year where the mechanics will probably be stressed too much by the teacher and she might hold back and not take risks because she is worried about making mistakes.

Helen: Actually in my grade one, even though I as the teacher wasn't overstressing mechanics, there was one little girl that was reading well and so she knew a lot about the structure of stories. But she herself was so hesitant, worrying about spelling all the time — about her work being so perfect that it was January before she began to create anything.

Katie: Sometimes these kinds of kids don't come through as being as bright as they are because while some kids are happy copying a bit of print out, these kids know there is much more to writing stories than that.

Paige: Even if they have a lot of stories read to them I think kids need to be taught. I don't know that they necessarily would figure out how to tell a story themselves. I don't think I did. You

need to be told and then when you read a story you go "Oh, this is how it goes." I guess it depends which way a person thinks.

Ashley: Don't you think that you intuitively learn how to tell stories?

Paige: But you can't use it, you can't apply it. You need the background it's true, but you need it to be pointed out by someone. With kids you have to do that.

Amanda: But if you said to a child who didn't have stories in their background "This is the way a story goes together" would it make any sense?

Paige: No, it wouldn't work that's true.

Katie: Just makes me think how complicated this whole topic is and how much teachers need to know to understand all this. Wow!

Theme: I feel excited when right before my eyes I see evidence of a child's learning.

Ashley's Reflections

This story reminds me of other times I have noticed children talking out loud. I especially remember one little boy who was trying to solve a little problem he had encountered at one of the centres and I overheard him trying to solve the situation by thinking out loud. Now I think of it, this child was also a very imaginative and creative little boy. Maybe it means

children who do this can step back and think about things through talk, by using language. Maybe it promotes clearer and more logical thinking. If this is true then we need to be encouraging this use of language in the classroom. Of course there are those children who are imaginative but do not do a lot of thinking out loud. But the connection is an interesting one to think about.

Comment

Ashley is fascinated with the ability of one of her students to orally tell a story which has all the desired elements that any fictional story from literature might feature. As she describes how this child goes about her storytelling, Ashley is exploring and confirming what she already knows about a part of the process involved in writing. She is making these things explicit for the other teachers who are listening. As the others question in order to get more detail they, too, are thinking about the complex connections between reading and writing and between language and thought.

Ashley: Story Three

The teachers return to the topic of meeting with parents during scheduled interview times. Ashley told about one of these meetings.

Ashley: Emma, you were talking about your interview with James and his mother. Well, I had this one interview that really has cost me a lot of sleepless nights. The Dad hadn't really said anything to me during the most of the time I was meeting with the parents. His son Timothy is still only four, so really young for kindergarten. I had never thought this child was really ready for school. We talked about the possibility of Timothy repeating kindergarten another year — whether that might be a consideration. Then the father suddenly started to talk about his child's last year's experiences in play school, and how much he had enjoyed the year — how much more he had learned in playschool than this year in my class. Then we discussed whether Timothy was enjoying himself in our kindergarten or whether he was feeling stress. The father said, "Maybe we should consider pulling him out of school. He doesn't like school, he doesn't like the way you talk too much to him. You know I don't talk much to him because he is so shy and so I just don't." But when the Dad said his child had learned more in play school than in my class it really got to me. Then I tried to explain to him about the kind of learning that his son had experienced in play school, which was apparently mostly rote memory — counting etc. But he just repeated, "he was doing way better in play school than with you."

Emma: It seems terrible to let anyone's remarks do what parents remarks can do to teachers.

Amanda: And it only takes one. It seems no matter how many positive comments you get they don't offset that one parent's complaint. I find I can't get a negative comment out of my mind.

Ashley: Have any of the rest of you ever had a parent say something like that? I feel like such a loser tonight. I can't stop thinking about it. This conversation really got to me.

Helen: When this has happened to me like it did in music, my administrator said, "just try to focus on all of the positive comments you've had and not dwell on this."

Amanda: This incident reminds me of one of my students — a little boy who had been in school in southern Alberta before moving here. In November his mother came to me and said that he was writing at home but was still using a mixture of lower and upper case letters and was not writing between the lines. She asked me to please watch him and tell him that the letters had to match. Then she brought in the printing books from this other school and I could see he had been doing a lot of copying print from the board. I tried to explain to her that my approach was to allow her son to get down his ideas in writing, to experiment with print, and then move toward forming more perfect letters. But she insisted that I send homework home. She said they were having a hard time to adjust.

Helen: I had a similar experience with a little boy. He created this beautiful page of writing one day and then when he took it home, it came back with words and letters crossed out. This parent said, "Why does he play all the time at school? Why doesn't he have any homework?"

Emma: I think a lot of parents are having trouble in understanding new approaches to learning to read and write. They are remembering their own school experiences and basing what should be happening for their children on these memories.

Amanda: Right! And parents take literally remarks their children make to them. Like, Paul, was going home telling his parents he "was bored" and when we talked about this it turned out that he couldn't go to the block centre the other day and that was what upset him. Paul is the child who came into our classroom from a very workbook, structured kind of program and he feels that he isn't working or learning anything if he isn't doing paper and pencil things. But he really wants to be building things, making things. The other day I decided to give him a choice of doing a workbook or going to blocks. Without a doubt he chose blocks. I sometimes wonder if he is being pressed by his mother to do "real work".

Theme: Negative comments from parents can be devastating to a teacher.

Ashley's Reflections

I think these comments from Timothy's dad frustrated me because they were a criticism of the roots of my program — my beliefs about children and learning. To hear "he doesn't like school" really bothered me because one of my main goals is to have children want to be at school and to feel good about themselves. Even now as I think about this incident, it haunts me. Parents just don't seem to understand that memorization is not learning, is not understanding something. The weird thing about this scenario too is that this year when Chris, who is now in grade one, sees me he runs up and hugs me and talks to me everyday. I understand more now that some parents have real difficulty accepting the fact that their child is having any problems at school. So they are apt to blame the teacher. I need to have some ready answers for these kinds of concerns because as a teacher I'm often hearing remarks that compare a child's play school experience to their kindergarten year at school.

Comment

"Have any of the rest of you had a parent say something like that?" In this episode, Ashley is reaching out for the support of her teacher friends. Because she believes a child's school experiences should be very positive ones and that it is her responsibility to ensure this, she feels "like such a loser" as she describes how she is very bothered by this parent's remarks. The other teachers offer their support by sharing examples of similar incidents and ways they have dealt with them.

Through this experience, Ashley is now more aware that while parents' educational goals for their children might be the same as the teachers, the difficulties often exist in the differing views of how to reach these goals. And as Ashley reflects on this experience she realizes that even though she may be confident in her beliefs and in her practice, she needs to develop her ability to articulate this knowledge to others.

KATIE'S STORIES

Emma just finished telling a story incident about a mother who was at an evening parent meeting at the school when she decided to leave her daughter a little note letting her know how pleased she was with her school work. This incident triggers a story for Katie.

Katie: Story One

Katie: Something similar happened in my class. As part of the getting ready for parents' night the kids made a big banner and arrows directing parents to the writing table in the room. They also decided to make a huge scroll to hang on the wall where parents could write messages to their own children. Then the next day the kids would gather around and read each others' messages. But unlike the parent you described Emma, who wrote such positive comments, one mother in my group wrote a note to her daughter that read, "I sure hope you improve this year, that you do better than you did last year." I

was really disappointed and felt badly about it. I asked the student if she thought we should cut it out of the scroll but she said "no" which surprised me, but maybe this girl had some understanding of what her mother was about, after all it was her mother. This particular mother had never been rude to me, but she had a reputation of being rude to others, especially the principal.

Emma: As you said, "that was her mother" and so this student obviously had an understanding of her. This probably didn't surprise the child.

Paige: I think kids understand their parents more than we think. Sometimes we're horrified at the way a parent acts with a child, but the child doesn't think as much about it — they're so used to people in their family right from birth.

Katie: One day she was even going to sue the school because her child went outside during a fire drill without wearing her shoes. Now this child is eight years old and I think she knows when to put her own shoes on.

Emma: I tell the kids that either you put your shoes on or you can't take part in things that require shoes.

Amanda: You know what I do. There is a child who used to tell me she didn't have shoes. Then I would see them sticking out of her locker. When she caught on that I had seen them in her

locker, she took them home. She just had to take gym in bare feet.

Katie: You know you can get clipped legally on things like this. But back to parents for a minute. Something good. A parent told me about a whole lot of little transfers she was noting that her child was making from her learning at school to what she was doing at home. She said, "Elizabeth was obviously learning this and that." I would never have noticed these things because I have so many kids all the time, but the parent knows this kid so well and has such an intense relationship. Like we were saying earlier, kids usually know their parents and what to expect from them, and parents know their kids too and can see things teachers don't or can't.

Theme: A parent's way and a teacher's way of relating to a child may be quite different, yet both very valid.

Katie's Reflections

The mother I referred to in my story episode again proved uncooperative in our home journal program. She refused to participate in responding to her daughter's letters to parents that all the students wrote as part of their journal writing. In reflection, now I realize I should have anticipated these kinds of difficulties and made an effort to help this mom and child situation. As teachers it is hard to influence parents as well as

the students and it takes time to make changes. Perhaps we could consciously set up situations to promote more parent understanding and not assume it is always natural for every parent and every teacher to think the same way.

Comment

Katie is disturbed when she sees the approach one parents takes in trying to get her child to do better work at school. As the teacher, she sees this way of relating to a child as pushing or threatening rather than encouraging or leading. But what this story illustrates is the reality that there are different ways to relate and to interact with a child depending on how we know the child and how the child knows us. Individuals within families have their own ways of communicating with each other as do separate family units. In the same way, individual teachers and children differ in their mode of communication, one from another. This incident strongly points to the need for teachers to understand these differences in modes of communication in order to understand the meaning each one of us is attempting to convey.

Katie: Story Two

The teachers continue their conversation about some of the benefits and ways of going about their trying to get to know students as persons and in the students knowing their teachers in the same way.

Katie: I've found the home journal writing tells me a lot about students and then when the parents write back to their child in the same journal they reveal a lot about themselves too. But it took me months and months to get one student, Linda, to write something — anything. I was very concerned about what could be done for this child in her writing. I tried directing her to write in response to the literature we'd been reading. I tried to direct her to write about what I thought she should be writing about. Then I discovered there was incest going on in her family. She was in the midst of court cases and other tragic experiences. This came out in her journal writing when she did write, and after reading what she was saying I destroyed much of it. The principal agreed that I do this. Many of the compositions were too terrible, too gruesome, to keep or to hand over to anyone. She would write about terrible details of incest and then come to me and say "Is this good teacher?" My principal and I discussed this. He would say, "Did Linda tell you this or that?" But we didn't know where to take it. So much of this came out in her writing and we didn't want it to get into the hands of somebody we didn't know or know what they might do with it. She was writing these little tiny pieces, one, two or three words and she was a bright girl, she spoke well and I knew she could write. In social studies, for instance, she would come up with something very insightful, right out of the blue. And then she would spend the next two days sitting in a daze and jibbering and writing all this stuff. I actually thought about keeping some of the writing

but I didn't want it hanging around. I really didn't know what to do with it. I couldn't share this story before with you or even write about it.

Emma: Sounds as if the writing had some sort of therapeutic effect on her, like writing these things down clarified them in some way.

Katie: Oh it did, I'm sure. I think if I had done something with the writing it would have totally destroyed her. She never asked for the writing back because I think she totally trusted me.

Paige: Also because the writing acted as therapy and that's why she did it, she wouldn't want it back. I know because when I've done that kind of writing I never want to see it again. I never want to look back at it. It's not the kind of writing you want to read because all you are doing is sorting things out.

Katie: I'm like that, too, with writing. When I'm deeply troubled I write far more than when things are going along well. When things are going well, I just live. I realize that weeks and months have gone by and I haven't written anything down. I think I use both talk and writing to sort things out but I probably use writing more than talk.

Theme: The teacher's intention for a writing task may not be the same as the child's as the writer.

Katie's Reflections

Linda needed so much more than I seemed to be able to give her. She was so confused and angry and abused physically and mentally that she was unable to do more than write a few lines. Here, obviously, was a troubled child and I was directing her to write about this and that — response to literature, etc. But how much can we direct the writing of a troubled child? She needed to write about these things for herself, yet should kids only write about topics of their own choice? No, not entirely. They need models, structure and guide-lines too.

Comment

Embedded within this narrative account about the difficulties of getting a child to write lies one of the most tragic realities of the world of a child — abuse. Yet Katie began and ended her story with the emphasis on Linda's writing problems.

In retrospect, Katie and the other teachers were not unaware of the incidents of abuse that were woven in and out of the storytelling. There was a sense of discomfort and helplessness in their body language and in voices as they talked about this situation. Yet they kept the topic of writing in the forefront almost as a protective barrier against dealing openly with such a painful topic. In the conversation that surrounded this sensitive issue the teachers concentrated on confirming their awareness that, even for children, writing can serve as a means of stepping back and sorting out our personal experiences. While there was talk about the responsibility a

teacher has for the confidences children might reveal in their personal writing, there were no immediate suggestions for concrete ways of acting on behalf of this child.

Katie: Story Three

The story of Linda and the discussion that followed the telling led into Katie's narrated account of an experience she had while attending a writing conference at another school.

Katie: One day I was attending a huge conference at another school and there were a lot of teachers there from the northern part of the province. The focus of the conference was on teaching writing. This particular school emphasizes writing a lot and so the people had come mainly to see what the students in this school had been doing. We've talked here so many times about different aspects of writing and I remember we've discussed the topic of publishing kids' work in the form of class books, on the walls or how it is often displayed in the school libraries. I remember in one of our discussions we were trying to figure out just how important this publishing was for kids' growth as writers or how meaningful it is to the kids, or is it just something that makes teachers feel good — that they think is wonderful. Well, at this conference we were paired up with certain students who would share their writing with us.While we were browsing around I noticed a sister, a nun, reading

one of the grade six girl's stories. When I looked at what she was reading I saw that these stories were mainly about incest. They were similar to Linda's experiences. I was shocked. I didn't think this kind of writing should be on display. Then I saw this nun talking to the student, trying to counsel her. I remember thinking, "I'm not sharing Linda's writing with anyone — I'm not handing it over to the lawyers to use or to the counsellor — no way." It was probably just lucky that this student got paired up with the nun, because we were just paired up with kids so we could read their writing and look at their books. I remember thinking that this girl's teacher should never have made this writing public.

Emma: Neither would I. There must have been lots of other writing of this student's that she could have used.

Carol: Some writing is meant to be shared and other writing, although they have made it public, is so private it still belongs to the student-author.It doesn't really belong to the teacher.

Helen: It can create a dilemma for a teacher, like making that decision about personal writing and what to do with it — how confidential is it?

Paige: This teacher probably didn't stop to think, but only made this piece public because it got lumped in with all the other writing that was done in the school.

Katie: I hope students like these, Linda and this girl, continue to write and, eventually, will write about other things. Sometimes I worry about whether I should have stepped in and shared that writing with the lawyer in Linda's case. No, I think, at least I hope, I did the right thing.

Theme: A teacher has a moral responsibility to know how to handle a child's confidence entrusted to her.

Katie's Reflections

I still think about Linda a lot. I think too about how teachers are so caught up in this publishing part of the writing with kids; how they think it is so wonderful and I question how meaningful displaying writing all over the place is for the kids themselves. How much does revising and publishing help their growth as writers? Writing for an audience and revising writing is only part of the craft of writing.

Comment

This second story incident told by Katie reminded the teachers of the weighty confidences teachers sometimes find entrusted to them. It helped them to realize the need for sensitivity and thoughtfulness in selecting pieces of writing for publication.

But this situation also provided Katie with a means for further reflection on the events surrounding her student, Linda. She now wonders if she could have acted differently; should she have "stepped in and shared that writing with the lawyer in Linda's case?" She is torn between the question of respecting the privacy of the child or taking action on a child's behalf. In any case, Katie along with the other teachers, seemed to be more critically aware of alternative possibilities concerning this issue.

HELEN'S STORIES

The group was talking about the kind of writing their students were doing in the classroom when Helen told this story.

Helen: Story One

Helen: Gordon is a very successful writer. He is always writing stories and seems to really enjoy writing and sharing whatever he writes with his classmates. One day during centre time I was talking with him about his writing and the progress his latest piece was taking. Then, suddenly, he took me quite by surprise by saying that he really did not like writing. My heart sank and I felt like crying! I asked him why and to explain what he meant. After hesitating for a while, he said that at times it was too hard to write and too hard to decide on a topic to write about. I had never thought of a year one student having a writer's block. They are all so enthusiastic about

writing. I thought I had created a very rich, inviting environment for writing, and that I had guided the children well and allowed them to choose their own topics. Gordon had a recording sheet for topics to write about. But now he is saying that none of these topics interested him. Then he explained, with great confidence in his voice, that he just didn't feel like writing today. I've thought about this and realize how I give kids so much choice in what to write about — they can write about whatever they want. I am wondering if sometimes they need help in knowing what to write about. They don't always know what to do. We are making progress though.

Katie: Did you find that giving him ideas or suggestions has helped, or did you do that?

Helen: With some kids that does help, but if Gordon doesn't feel like writing he just won't write. The other day we were talking about making a mind map and I thought it would be interesting for him to do a mind map about how he felt about writing. He said, "I'll do a mind map about Gordon in winter." When I started to say, "Well I'd like it if you did..." he just took the paper and walked away. There was no changing his mind.

Paige: I had a little boy in my class like that too. He would get writer's block and yet he could write fabulously.

Helen: But when Gordon wants to write he will write a ten page story, but if he doesn't feel like writing he won't put down one word.

Amanda: It's interesting because as you know, I taught Gordon in kindergarten. I remember he didn't spend a lot of time writing, but what does stand out in my mind is the time he spent at creating and building things.

Helen: That is one of his motivations for writing. He will often make something and then write about it.

Amanda: I remember now, I couldn't believe the details in some of his creations in kindergarten.

Helen: And at math time he will say to me, "you know I can write when I'm at home in my free time, but I can't do these kinds of things at home."

Amanda: My impression of Gordon was that he was a very straight, serious kid. Not an easy going, happy go lucky type of little boy. I thought he was like a little old man of six.

Helen: Yes, he is serious. But sometimes he shows a real sense of humour. For instance, if I forget to put the agenda up he will go to the board and write "rug time, home time, reading time", laughing all the while he is doing this.

Amanda: Oh yes, he is an interesting child. I always found him interesting.

Helen: One story he wrote he took to the principal. It was wonderful and I talked to him about having it published and so he took it home that night and typed it, by himself.

Theme: It is difficult to find a balance in giving children choice and in providing them with appropriate direction.

Helen's Reflections

This incident concerned a child not wanting or feeling like writing on a particular day. This again makes me think about topic choice for children in writing. When should writing be the student's choice and when the teacher's? A question I'm still battling with is how to reach a balance in this area. Reflecting on this story also made me think about creating alternatives to story writing in my classroom. Often their time was utilized by their writing stories of their own choice or they would write pattern stories where they chose the pattern such as the "I like" books they did. I never stopped to think that perhaps there are some days even a successful young writer may not feel like doing either of these things. I am now trying to develop more alternatives for students to turn on "writer's block" days. Maybe they can write tongue twisters, more poetry and more non-fiction or write more in the various subject areas.

Comment

Helen in retrospect accepts Gordon's feelings about not wanting to write and tries to understand this task from his point of view. Still, she is puzzled about how to handle this situation. She is also disappointed because, as most teachers do, she intuitively counts on his continued interest in something he does well and something she feels is important for him to do.

What Helen and the others are coming to understand through this experience is that children, like all of us, grow and change. And sometimes when we change, our interests and the way we do things can change too. Ultimately it was Gordon, however, who led the way for the teacher. She began to think of different approaches to writing, of opening up alternatives for children who wanted to try different things and even more importantly, she realized every child can simply have an "off day."

Helen: Story Two

When Helen tells her story, the teachers were talking about the merits of using a thematic approach to learning in their classrooms.

Helen: At our school the grade one teachers usually get together to plan themes. Like in September there are themes such as orientation, families, cats, things like that. I use literature for my themes too and I get a lot of ideas from different children's

books we read. For instance I like the book Boss for a Week because it has lots of little things in it. There are these little speech balloons here and there, little signs indicating this and that, lots of details. What I noticed was that the children seem to know without my telling them that these little bits of print are not part of the actual text of the story. They know you can read them separately from the story text. It is interesting, they know it has something to do with the content of the story but that it isn't necessary to read this part in order to understand the story. They are also into wanting to read what is written on the jackets of books.

Emma: Boss for a Week, that's a wonderful book. I find I use themes in my classroom differently than I used to. I used to say to the kids at the beginning of the year, "Now this year we are going to learn this theme, and so on" I would be the one who chose the themes, in other words. Now we talk about topics we want to learn about and then we vote to decide on certain ones, so it becomes a more student-centered use of themes. I find when the ideas are the students', they are much more enthusiastic. Of course not everyone is enthusiastic all the time, but they know that during the year they will eventually get to a topic they want. These are grade three kids, I don't know if this would work with younger children, say in kindergarten.

Ashley: Oh, yes, we work like this all the time in kindergarten. I'm always asking the kids for ideas and trying to go with their

interests. We do a lot of things too that originate with literature — with the books we read aloud.

Amanda: I know what you mean, Helen, about the kids noticing little things in books. My kids are always wanting to know if there is a picture of the author or the artist on the book cover. They're becoming very conscious of all these details of books. They notice, for instance, if the illustrations are on one cover or if they extend right around the book jacket.

Emma: These things we take so for granted. My class really enjoyed Steven Kellog's Paul Bunyan. On the first page is a picture with no text and yet this is the very beginning of the story and shows what happens before you read it in print. Then at the end of the book the print finishes but the pictures go on telling the story. These kinds of things really turn them onto literature and they learn about what comprises a book, not just the cover.

Helen: Sometimes I take a particular book and focus on the illustrations such as in Where the Wild Things Are. I ask the kids what they see in the pictures and they will see all sorts of details that I don't.

Emma: Maybe kids see these things because they are not as preoccupied as we are or, maybe, we see them but don't comment. When kids comment too, it is usually when they are looking at a book in a group. Details are triggered for others when one person sees something. Maybe the talk helps. It is

like here in our group, you say something and it triggers something for me. We just seem to need that trigger to take us that one step beyond.

Theme: Listening to children's talk tells me lots about their learning

Helen's Reflections

This story really helps me to appreciate the role of literature and how it really works in a reading writing classroom. Reading stories to children has always evoked feelings and reminded them of their own experiences, but thinking about this story episode I realize how aware kids are of the actual text, the format of the print itself. In this particular story I was reading to the kids they were noticing text that was not essential to, or part of, the story itself. I realize they were aware of other features of a book such as the author. This reminds me of other occasions, other times of discovery, other books we've read again and again where they noticed the kinds of punctuation used in the books such as quotation and exclamation marks, question marks and size of print.

Comment

Here, Helen and the other teachers are seeing an excellent example of children actively involved in creating their own meaning out of their encounter with a particular book. Helen's story began with the teachers in

her school taking full control of children's learning by planning themes to use in their teaching. But the telling of this incident facilitated all of the teachers here in finding out more about the significance in children not only hearing books read aloud, but in talking about them and exploring their many features. In so doing Helen saw how children were sorting out the purpose of the print, not just in the story text of the book, but print that was inside the jacket cover, little details of symbols and lettering on those first title and copyright pages.

"These are things we take for granted," said one of the teachers. As experienced readers, we know intuitively what to read and what not to read. And this is a reading lesson that teachers of course would never formally teach, yet for literate readers it is a very important one to learn.

STORIES AS A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

The story narratives the teachers told orally, discussed and wrote about, emerged out of their common interests, issues and their shared understandings of the changing role of the teacher in a changing society. They are stories about teaching that we have ourselves told at one time or another or heard from other teachers we have known. In that sense they are not unusual. But this particular collection of stories and teacher talk, if read carefully, tells us of another kind of story within each story.

For apart from accounts of children engaged in learning events or encounters with parents, these stories are narrative accounts of teacher's own learning through their teaching. They are concrete examples of the wider questions of first, the role of narrative in how we give meaning to

experience; and second, narrative as a kind of knowledge that evolves from action. But above all, these teachers' narratives tell us about their transformative experiences made possible to them through the telling and listening to each others' stories.

Within this chapter, and along the way, I have attempted to identify signposts of some of the acquired insights that led to possible transformation in the teachers' thinking or practice. It is difficult, however, to easily capture or list evidence of transformation if we are thinking of change as being something or someone distinctly different. Change of that nature is as Novak (1978) says, "organic, continual, gradual" and as he reminds us that "humans grow like oaks, in silence and almost imperceptibly" (p. 44).

Yet I did see a very important aspect of change in the teachers' thinking and reflective awareness during the year. I saw a new awareness of many of their own beliefs about the teaching learning process, about the children they met everyday and about themselves as teachers and persons.

For example, the teachers who frequently told stories of being fascinated with what children could do, were critically exploring their tacit understanding of how children learn through discovery and interaction. By reflecting on children's comments, both spoken and written, the teachers were continually coming to know the different worlds of each child from his or her point of view. And those who showed their vulnerability when they fell short of expectations, their own and others, were also showing signs of new insights on these aspects of their teaching.

Another important dimension in the teachers' personal development was the critical recognition that their own knowledge came from their own interpretations and understandings. Nevertheless this awareness did not take away from the knowledge they considered to be more theoretical. Just the opposite happened. Finding their own voices and making knowledge their own, strengthened, not weakened, what they had learned from others. I saw this factor as an important step in dissolving the traditional theory-practice division and dichotomy.

Even if in some instances where it appeared that the teachers did not make any changes but kept the same perspectives and values, they did so with greater awareness of other possibilities, other ways of seeing reality, and other means for future pedagogical action. In this sense, all of the teachers were in some way changed by this research experience.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS

> It is through the process of systematic reflection that teachers can most enrich the research process — reflection on their own teaching, upon interpretation of data collected, and upon the implications for practice...
>
> Arthur Applebee, 1987, p. 715.

This chapter is an attempt to bring together the teachers' experiences of looking back and reflecting on the stories, their own writing and the variety of meanings the story narratives held for them. It is also an opportunity for me as the researcher-teller and interpreter of the teachers' stories, to reflectively consider first, the process involved in the teachers' pedagogical awareness and insights and second, the broader thematic meaning that speaks to certain pedagogical principles. But for all of us — the teachers and the researcher — the experience of reflection is an important one as it allows us to stand back from ourselves in order to find meaning.

THE TEACHERS REFLECT ON THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Toward the end of the school year, the teachers individually formulated theme statements from each of their own stories in an attempt

to grasp the significance embedded within the experiential account itself. As part of this process they read over and reflected on, not only the story text, but all the writing from their university papers and their dialogue journals. In keeping with the collaborative nature of this study they then came together to discuss their experiences as teacher learners.

They talked about how their relationships with each other had developed during the research project. They compared the awkwardness and hesitancy to honestly express their ideas during the first meeting, to the more relaxed openness and trust they now felt for each other. In other words, they had initially come together as strangers and through this experience they had become friends.

They then discussed the multi-layered meanings they had found within each story and throughout the story narratives and discourse as a whole. The task of arriving at a single theme statement had been a difficult one for most of the teachers. Clearly, the idea that we bring to a text "that most complex of constructs — ourselves" (Yolen, 1985, p. 590) was reinforced for everyone involved in this search for meaning. As a group they revised and reworded the theme statements as they considered other ways of seeing a situation and alternative possibilities for other appropriate interpretations. In other words, they discovered the reality of Terry Eagleton's words "that the meanings of a text do not lie within them like wisdom teeth within a gum, waiting patiently to be extracted" (1983, p. 89).

Embedded within the teachers' discussion concerning their experience as teacher researchers, the conversation seemed to revolve around questions such as: "What was it like to read and reflect on their own story narratives?" "What had they learned about children and about

themselves as teachers and storytellers?" As I listened for answers to these implied questions, I heard the teachers' voices separately and yet joined together in echoing their experiences.

The following is a synthesis of the teachers' responses to reading over the written text. I have presented their reflections on this experience as one collective voice speaking through the themes of reliving, connecting, and learning. These themes emerged from data.

Reliving

> When I read over my own stories along with the stories of the other teachers, it was like living the whole year all over again. Here it all was in print. The voices, the laughter, the coffee chatter of the group all came back to me. I could hear each one's voice telling their own story. I remembered how often I came to the meetings feeling terribly tired but then after being together and talking about our day I felt really energized and rejuvenated. I got thinking about other teachers I know, and wishing they could have this kind of experience too.
>
> Then the sounds of the classroom came back. I especially thought about those particular kids I had taught last year. There were some things I regretted as I was thinking about them. For instance, I wish I hadn't reacted quite so emotionally or as quickly to every little thing a child did or said. I think I could have done more for some children too if I had had more time. But mostly, as I read this text over, I realized I had

done a pretty good job. Going back to these situations also made me think about how we change from year to year in what gets us all riled up. Distancing has a way of bringing things into perspective, I guess.

Then when I read over my journal writing I remembered how nervous I was at the beginning of this project. It had been years since I'd written anything like this and I wasn't sure what June expected us to write. However, being part of this group forced me to write and as a result I did something I never thought I could do before — write!

For me, reliving by rereading the year's experience of being in my own classroom and here with the group of other teachers has been an important one. But I realize that there was a lot of reliving going on during the project year as well. For instance, I found lots of examples of where we were reliving our university days of our practicums — both good and bad, and studying all those theories in different courses. Somehow, reliving those times during the storytelling brought back to life the meaning of some of that theory when I saw it in action in my own classroom.

Connecting

Reading one story episode reminded me of another story either told by someone else in the group or by another teacher at another time. For instance, as I read Amanda's story of her kids building and creating all kinds of things out of milk cartons,

pipe cleaners, egg cartons and so on, I thought about Ashley's similar account of her kids working with magnets. Then I remembered a time in my classroom when the children were very creatively involved in a science activity. Their enthusiasm, and their concentration in what they were doing suddenly came back to me. It seemed as if these stories, told almost as a set of stories, reinforced for me the importance in open ended activities to encourage children to be spontaneous and to use their imaginations to think and to create.

There were other stories that helped me to make connections between our world as teachers and the worlds the children live in. When I re-read the stories of the children whose lives consisted of cruelty and abuse, I was struck by the different attitudes teachers held toward this kind of writing. The children in these cases were writing about their experiences, their feelings, while the teachers involved were concerned with quality and form and getting the writing published for an audience such as a school fair.

There were many stories told over the year about children learning to write. Reading them over again makes me realize that I'm not alone in never being sure when I'm giving children either too much direction in their writing or, worse, not enough.

Another thing I noticed as I read over the stories was how some of us seemed to focus on one topic more than another. For example, Ashley, Katie and Helen usually talked about incidents revolving around children doing some kind of

writing. Whereas, Amanda seemed to concentrate more on children's different kinds of organization and interaction. I remember Paige jokingly called her stories "a collection of frustrations" because they mostly dealt with controversial issues with children and parents.

There seemed to be a connection between the kind of incidents we observed, the frequency of similar incidents, where we all were at the time, and our major area of interest in our teaching. This factor was made clearer when Emma pointed out how her story topics seemed to cover a wider variety of subjects. She hypothesized that this fact might be a result of her noting incidents in places other than the classroom. She mentioned for example, "picture taking times; gym classes, on the playground during recess" among others.

But for me, thinking about the connection between the subjects we focused on in our storytelling and our teaching was probably the most revealing. Seeing the similarities as patterns in topics we wanted to tell about over and over helped me to see the kinds of things that we were doing on a daily basis in the classroom. These were the kinds of things that obviously were important to me.

Learning

To read over my own words and think about our research year away from the group meetings gave me a different perspective on what we were doing. I can see how much I've learned. Last year it was as if I was seeing things in the classroom for the first time. Reading these transcripts of my own

words now, it sounds as if I was constantly amazed at everything going on around me. Being my first year with children this age, I didn't know what to expect. This year I'm still "amazed" but I think I'm recognizing much earlier what kids are doing and I'm concentrating more on what to do to help them go on.

I'm still struggling over the amount of testing that goes on in the school. But I've learned a bit more about the reasons for this trend toward more of this kind of evaluation. I'm beginning to see the connection between test results and accountability of teachers and schools in the eyes of the public. I know I'm still learning about all of these things.

When I think about some of the things I focused on in the stories, like children writing in a certain way or not wanting to write at all, I understand these things far more clearly now. For instance, it was to be expected that Michael wanted to do patterned writing. After all, most of the books we were reading in class had very strong patterns in them so it naturally follows that what kids are reading influences their writing. And like all of us, kids have certain days when they are not in the mood to write at all. And I'm like that too.

I thought too how concerned I was about Gordon because I thought he was regressing in his writing. Thinking about this now I realize that he was still simply experimenting or playing with print along with the other children. This is what Marie Clay has been saying for years and I've heard this and read this and yet I hadn't really "known" it.

> In retrospect I think we've all learned a little more about ourselves as teachers by exploring what we do and what we believe in for kids.

THE RESEARCHER REFLECTS ON NARRATIVE AS PROCESS OF TEACHERS' LEARNING

There are a number of reasons teachers want to tell stories of personal experiences as part of conversations with other teachers. But if we consider stories told in any kind of conversation we will see how they serve a number of different functions. First, we tell stories to illustrate a point, to clarify or strengthen what we want to say. Second, we tell stories to "transmit a message, often one with some sort of moral evaluation or implied critical judgment about the world the teller shares with other people" (Polanyi, 1985, p. 187).

The teachers in this study told stories frequently to make a point about the difficulties they faced working with parents in the community; about the social and cultural problems they encountered; about the political constraints and so on. Most of these stories served the very important purpose of "letting off steam", expressing frustrations and the like. But many of the teachers' stories were told to share a confidence, to reveal intimate sides of themselves or to celebrate children's learning.

The Teller's Intent

Sometimes we may decide to tell a story about something that has happened to us or to someone else. While we are in the midst of the telling, we realize the purpose we began with is taking a new direction and, hence, creates a new meaning for us.

Emma's first story illustrates this point. The original intent of the storyteller (Emma) was to add another example of how bright and insightful Jeremy (her student) indeed was. The function of the story, however, ultimately served as a lens to see anew other children and to make appropriate changes in the way she carried out future spelling bees in the class.

Paige's first story is another example of how the intent in the telling can shift to serve another purpose. The teller's intent was to share her shock and disbelief at the negative attitude shown by some of her students toward their classmates who were native. The story, however, served as a catalyst for her to think about all the other children's attitudes toward each other and what she might do to improve the relationships among them.

Structuring the Stories

I perceived a number of commonalities in the way the teachers verbally used the narrative mode to shape or structure their own experiences into the form of a story. While they, of course, used their own style of language to discover their own voice and to narratize their experiences, they used similar structuring devices to shape their narrative

discourse to make meaning of it. Then, as we all do when we tell stories of any kind, the teachers incorporated, into the narrating, features and patterns of structure found in literary narratives. Elements such as events told in sequential order and framed by a variety of beginnings and ending phrases were obviously part of the way they verbalized the story narratives. In telling, the teachers intuitively drew on their years of conversational storytelling and their cultural experiences with reading, writing, and seeing stories in film.

Stories the teachers brought to the meetings in written form — ones they had already shaped into a narrative — were presented as more polished versions of the incidents than those told spontaneously. There were fewer starts and stops within the story text and the sequence of events were ordered more closely to the way they had happened. The closure in these written accounts were also more clearly defined.

Self Oriented and Other Oriented Stories

The stories varied in the degree to which the teller (the teacher) was involved in the actual experiences being recreated. Some of the storied incidents emphasized the teacher's own actions, feelings and thinking more than the actions of the other people in the story. Then there were other stories where the teller de-emphasized herself and acted more as a witness to the events and actions of others in the situation. Sandra Stahl (1983) describes these distinctions in the way personal stories are presented as those that are "self-oriented" and those that are "other-oriented". As I examined the teachers' narratives I discovered there were not only more

"self-oriented" stories than "other-oriented" but that some of the teachers seemed to be more drawn to one perspective over another.

Although I did not collect data to verify this point, I did notice a relationship between the teacher's personality, her usual style of communicating and her willingness to become vulnerable, and the approach she took in telling her story. All of these factors had a shaping influence on the kind of meaning that was made by the teller and the listener.

Examples of a "self-oriented" story in this research collection might include Ashley's first story. In this story Ashley used the Hallowe'en incident of one child's experience as a unifying element to make her own values and actions intelligible to herself. On the other hand, Katie's second story suggests a stronger tendency toward "other-oriented", as the teller in collaboration with the principal, witnessed the actions of the student and the surrounding events. Katie downplayed her role in this situation. Another example of the teller de-emphasizing her role is revealed in Emma's story of the spelling bee. Here, she described the situation, but she distanced herself from taking part in the events as they unfolded.

The intent to present an oral personal narrative in a way that emphasizes or de-emphasizes one's own role is hardly a deliberate act in the same way one might go about setting up and writing a fictional story with a plan to narrate from a particular point of view. Rather, it is the result of the way we intuitively, at that moment, begin a tale and the way we proceed through it. But the approach the teller takes at the beginning can have a direct effect on the meaning listeners create and the way that meaning is formulated.

Orienting the Listener

Just as any storyteller does, the teachers began their stories with some kind of attention-getting statement which announced, in the midst of the conversation, that a story was to follow. These opening remarks were part of the background information which helped to set the stage and to clarify the events which followed. They acted for the teller of a personal story in the way the "once upon a time" beginning does for the teller of fiction. These beginnings also acted as bridges between the conversational narrative and the story proper. This transitional talk is referred to by Polanyi (1985) as "entrance talk", while Bauman (1986) describes this setting of the stage as "orientation".

Then, in order to orient the listeners, the tellers explained who the people involved in the situations were, and they provided any needed contextual details concerning the situation before entering into the main part of the story. Helen, in her first story explained that Gordon was "a very successful writer. He is always writing stories and seems to really enjoy writing and sharing whatever he writes with his classmates."

Amanda oriented her listeners by informing them of her recent status in the school (story one). "I came to the school I'm teaching in now in January so it was really the middle of the school year." Paige wanted her listeners to know how she perceived a certain child before she related the incident about him (story two). "This child is a very reactive student, he has poor self esteem, he is forgetful, he takes everything home and never remembers to bring anything back." And for the listeners, Helen set the story incident in the context of the way things are done at her school (story

two). "At our school the grade one teachers usually get together to plan themes."

The Story Events

As the teachers verbally moved through the events, they often revealed some form of conflict or dissonance. Many of these problems were embedded within descriptions of either/or situations which served as a way of categorizing and examining alternatives. In this sense the stories served as a sounding board which allowed the teachers to test out their feelings, beliefs, and values.

For instance, Emma described how she missed her own students when she became a cooperating teacher and yet, she found this experience a strong form of professional development. Amanda was torn between following her own judgement of children's progress and meeting the demands of the school for external testing. Paige was frequently frustrated with the problem of how to act with children and at the same time work with certain parents in the child's best interest. Katie, along with her principal, struggled with an either/or situation in how to deal with the personal writing of a child who was in the midst of abuse.

This structural dimension of the stories illustrates how the teachers were actively involved in organizing their experiences in such a way that served as a dialectic to bring to the surface and to explore a problem situation from the perspective of polar opposites — a notion put forth by George Kelly (1955) as a way to construct and make sense of our own reality.

The Story Endings

Although many of the teachers' stories presented certain problems, the endings, unlike some stories of fiction, seldom involved an obvious or satisfactory solution. Some of the stories indicated a circular pattern where the ending suggested only a return to the beginning dilemma. For example, Ashley began her first story with "I was really impatient with a particular child the other day" and ends with "I think I'm probably inconsistent, sometimes I'm very patient and at other times I wonder about myself." Emma began her third story with a description of a particularly frustrating parent and child conference. She began with the child's preoccupation with Nintendo games and winds up her story with "I don't understand this Nintendo game anyway, I don't know all the characters, I don't understand it."

The teachers' stories proceeded to the end with an account of the events, interspersed with evaluative statements, which showed the effect of the incident on the people involved, and on themselves. "I was very concerned." "I enjoyed this more than before." "I felt so surprised..." "I was thrilled but..." "I couldn't believe what I was seeing..." "I was disappointed, shocked actually..."

Clearly, these stories did not resemble what Clandinin and Connelly, (1990) refer to as the "happily ever after Hollywood plot", nor were they in Labov's (1972) terms, "a complete narrative" that concludes with a resolution. Endings such as the ones mentioned above, which suggested more of a rearranging of a situation than a solution to it, however, left open

the possibilities for further reflection and for others to enter into the story — to continue the process of inquiry through further conversation.

Although many of the stories did not reveal new awareness explicitly, it would be misleading to assume that some change in understanding was not present in the process of this kind of story telling. Even within the stories that moved in a circular direction where the ending returned to the beginning dilemma, the re-making of knowledge was happening by turning around what had been seeing by reflecting on it and recoding it, by verbalizing it in some other way to represent old experiences to ourselves anew (Barnes, 1985).

THE USE OF NARRATIVE IN CONVERSATION

There was much discussion around many of the teachers' stories. And the important role that this discussion played in the teachers' acquiring pedagogical insights can not be overemphasized. The way the teachers engaged in conversation provided each person with the opportunity to question, to reflect on their own situations and those of others, and to rewrite in new ways some aspect of their own teacher lives. Barnes (1985) describes this power in learning through interaction as partly existing in the capacity "to bring our own interpretive systems into interaction with the interpretive systems of other people" (p. 23).

Seeking Information

The questions the teachers asked each other were mostly directed toward finding out more information in order to get a clearer sense of the situation. Such questions were usually posed immediately following the storytelling. The questioning at this point became important in order, not only to clarify a situation, but when the teller added more detail there was greater possibility for a deeper interpretation of the events. These possibilities may have involved focusing, or in Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) term, "burrowing" more thoroughly into the incident itself or generalizing it to explain some other issue or set of events in life.

After Emma's first story, Paige asked, "Why do you have spelling bees at all?" This question forced Emma to think about and explain how she perceived an activity she had employed for years. "Well, I guess they are a way of drilling and practicing words they need to know, and the kids really like them; I always thought they really enjoyed them."

Then Katie's questions, "Have you ever asked other kids how they feel?" and "Do you think others don't like them either?", allowed Emma to concentrate on the particular incident and also to think of it in terms of the effect on the other children in her class. These questions prompted Emma to take action by presenting this subject to her students for their consideration.

Other examples of questions that concentrated on the incident itself include Katie asking Helen (story one) if she found that giving Gordon topics to write about had previously been helpful; Ashley (story three) asking the whole group if any of them had ever had a parent say something

similar; and Emma's question to Paige (in story two) "Did you have the student actually sitting in on the conversation."

While these questions were asked to get more information about a specific event, it is interesting to note that the teacher did not continue the conversational questioning if she found the direction the questions were taking were no longer relevant. In other words, they were not passive recipients of the questions. Rather, they took an active role in changing direction when necessary. For instance, Paige (story two) was describing the problem with getting some children to finish a task they had started when Amanda asked, "What kinds of things do you think are important for them to finish?" Paige replied, "Well, a sheet of printing or an assignment." However, she went on to say, "I think you are missing the point." She then directed the subject back to explain her initial concern, "I'm talking about commitment here."

Generalizing Beyond the Incidents

During the discussion there were other comments and questions which prompted the teachers to go beyond the specific incident involving one child to a generalization of other students in the class, or even to a broader issue in situations outside the school. Amanda's question to Paige, who was describing how some children were treating native children in her class, suggests going beyond the specific incident. "Is that attitude just with native kids or do you see that with other nationalities or ethnic groups as well?" Then later in the discussion, Amanda made the connection between the attitudes of these particular children toward each other and

linked this to the notion of power and control. "It's as if there is a power thing at work here. One child can influence others and is controlling the others. I've seen this in other ways in my class"

Carol's comment in response to Amanda's story of children learning from each other is another example of the teachers generalizing beyond the incident itself. "It reminds me of a session I attended with Jane Hansen when she asked us if we were allowing kids to develop (response-ability) or the ability to respond to each other" (Amanda's third story). Carol also remarked, in discussion of Amanda's (first story) about children being tested, "It makes you wonder where these testing programs come from, where do they originate?" To which Helen added, "I think the testing for academic challenge programs becomes a real status thing in the community..."

The conversation surrounding Emma's second story, however, concerning the role of a cooperating teacher probably illustrates this point most obviously. While the talk began with Amanda's acceptance of Emma's feelings of missing her own class, the subject for discussion moved from Emma's particular situation toward the teachers' general concerns about practicum experiences. Among their concerns was the artificial situation in which student teachers were placed during their practice teaching. They felt the student was inhibited from using her own style, showing her own personality or just being herself. They questioned whether the practicum situation was a valid measure of a student's potential to be a good teacher.

The teachers' discussion in this instance did not return to the initial topic presented by Emma in the storytelling. Their strong feelings concerning this issue seemed to overtake the subject in the original incident.

Making Suggestions to Each Other

A closer look at the teachers' discussions revealed the frequency of explanations and suggestions the teachers offered to each other. Reasons given for why certain events took place in certain ways or explanations for their own actions seemed helpful in enabling the teachers to arrive at an awareness and clearer understanding of certain situations.

Helen, in her second story described the kinds of detailed aspects of print such as in speech balloons used with pictures in books and print on book jacket covers, which the children were beginning to notice. She wondered at children's ability to see such detail. Emma, in response, gave a possible explanation. "Maybe the kids see these things because they are not as pre-occupied as we are, or maybe we see them but don't comment. Also when kids comment on these things it is usually when they are looking at a book in a group and the ideas are triggered for others to see."

Paige offered a possible explanation to Katie when she told about her disappointment about the negative comments one of the parents wrote in a note to her daughter which read, "I sure hope you improve this year, that you do better than you did last year." Paige explained to Katie that "I think kids understand their parents more than we think. Sometimes we're

horrified at the way a parent acts but the child doesn't think as much about it because they're so used to people in their own family right from birth."

The suggestions the teachers offered to one another, such as the one Emma was given (to ask her whole class about their opinions concerning spelling bees) were not always as readily accepted. Ashley suggested to Emma that perhaps the particular student's obsession with Nintendo games would "die a natural death and he will just get over it himself." But this suggestion was dismissed by Emma with, "Well, I don't think so, he's in grade three now and he even has Nintendo magazines..."

Carol offered Paige the suggestion that the attitude toward native children in her class was a case of "scapegoating", "There is always going to be that one child that is different in some way." However, Paige rejected that suggestion. "No, I don't think it is it's the attitude of this whole class..." While the suggestions from each were not always accepted they did, however, open up other choices or alternatives for the teachers to think about a particular event in light of their differing beliefs and viewpoints.

At other times, suggestions were readily accepted and followed. Katie suggested to Paige, "Some kids are just easier to know than others — like all of us, I guess. Makes you think of the poor, shy, quiet ones, doesn't it, who have such a hard time." Paige agreed with this explanation, "Yes, I hadn't seen that before and it's so obvious." Then she accepted Helen's practical suggestions for ways to help children get to know each other better in the classroom by agreeing, "Right. Good, I'll try." Katie suggested to Ashley, who was expressing her discontent at not always being as patient as she would like to be. "We have these classes and we always know we are responsible... so many things... we can only do the best we can... Maybe the

important thing is that we are aware of this and need to try to allow time for the important things." The many suggestions made to each other surrounding the storytelling incidents seemed to serve as a lens through which the teachers could look and confirm their own situations or see them in a new light.

Identifying With Each Others' Situations

Finally, an essential aspect of the teachers' learning through the storytelling of others was revealed in the way they strongly identified with the emotions or the experiences expressed by the other person. This linking of one's own experience with another's seemed to yield not only an acceptance or awareness of other people's ideas but a deeper understanding of themselves or their own situations. After Carol listened to Amanda's story about the frequent practice of testing children for reading ability she said, "I know what you mean, I've found that kids who are identified too early for academic challenge are often later found to be just ordinary bright kids." Carol went on, however, to think about, and to comment on, the funding cutbacks and how these cuts would affect procedures for determining childrens' needs.

Children learning from each other was the subject of Amanda's third story. This telling prompted Paige to confirm for Amanda and for herself that children really do learn effectively within a community of learners. Paige described how recently she "let the kids go around the room to see how many things they could read. Together they read charts, rules, posters, things like that. I sat back and thought when I was first teaching I

would have felt guilty at something like this, but now I can see how much they are learning when they help each other."

In Helen's second story she talked about how the teachers in her school organize their programs around themes. This story reminded Emma of how she used themes in her classroom now in a very different way than when she first began teaching: "I used to say to the kids at the beginning of the year, 'now this year we are going to learn this theme.' I chose the themes. Now, we talk about topics we want to learn more about and then we decide together on certain ones so it has become a more student centered use of themes." Then she added, "I find when the ideas are the students' they are much more enthusiastic."

Sometimes this linking of one's own experience with a situation mentioned in the storytelling involved a childhood memory. This was evident for Amanda during the discussion of the spelling bee incident. She was reminded of her own feelings as a child taking part in spelling bees. "I always hated spelling bees when I was a kid and I still don't like giving kids competitive games even now as the teacher."

On another occasion, Amanda attempted to empathize with Emma's feelings of being somewhat left out as a cooperating teacher even though she hadn't been teaching long enough to have a student teacher. "I think that's a perfectly normal feeling. You get so attached to the kids you teach you'd probably feel you've abandoned them or something...It must be an adjustment, though, to have someone you don't know come into your classroom for four to eight weeks." Identifying in this way allowed Amanda to place herself momentarily into this situation and to imagine what this experience might be like for her.

Assessing the Situation

There were several instances where the teachers used "expressive language" (Britton, 1970) not simply to communicate events, but they used speech to question and to sort things out even as they were involved in telling a story. Language used in this exploratory way allowed the teller to move toward coherence through talk or as Barnes (1986) says, "to monitor her own thought and reshape it" (p. 28). As the teachers used language for learning, they engaged in what Britton refers to as the "participant role", which is the language of getting things done or attempting to influence others. They also engaged in the "spectator role" which allowed the teachers to take part in each others' events within the safety of their own experience. "As participants we apply our value systems but as spectators we generate and refine the system itself" (Britton 1982, p. 51).

In one of the stories Paige told about her students' emergent writing she mentioned seeing great improvement, but until now she hadn't given it much thought. During the telling, she brought into the open and named specific aspects in the children's writing that indicated they were learning: "I mean their ideas seemed to come more readily"; "it was more personal, nothing artificial"; "they wrote more fluently, more interestingly"; and, "well, now that I think of it, I really enjoyed reading this writing".

As Paige identified and named the qualities in the children's writing that stood out for her, she was composing a list for herself of what constitutes good writing at this level. As a result, she was coming to a clearer understanding of precisely why she saw improvement.

Similarly, Amanda was in the midst of describing a classroom project that had gone especially well when she paused to express, "You know, I don't think I've ever seen the children so enthusiastic. I mean they've probably never worked like this before, you know, it felt really good to see the kids so happily involved."

Both Paige and Amanda interrupted the narrative flow of events during the telling to stand back, momentarily, and to interject personal evaluative comments. Within the telling of their own stories they indicated a sense of new awareness of what their students were actually doing as well as the pedagogical value in what they were doing.

Generating Other Stories

When the teachers listened to each other with interest, they often responded to a particular story by telling another story of their own. One story triggered another, which is what happened to Ashley as she listened to Amanda's tale of how her students had been involved in discovery learning. Ashley commented, "You know this makes me think of something similar that happened in my classroom." She then proceeded to present a detailed account of her students successfully learning math through a creative aesthetic activity. She finished her story with an explicit awareness that, "I guess we don't always have to be the ones to design a game or task to see if kids know certain skills."

Paige's story of the native children in her class triggered a number of other stories among the group. Carol told about a similar experience when

she was teaching in an inner city school. "There was a little girl named Kim. Her father was Chinese and her mother was white. Some of the kids in the class were not very positive towards her; they would make remarks and so on." Carol went on to describe the little girl and to tell about how she discovered Kim's parents were being treated in a similar manner by the other parents in the community. Toward the end of the telling, Carol said, "I realize now that the kids were learning these attitudes from their parents. The kids were just following along."

Several other stories evolved out of the original incident of discrimination presented by Paige. The teachers shared their experiences of how certain children were treated unfairly by others. Helen described the problems surrounding a behaviour disordered child and how the children's attitude toward him was influenced by his disruptive behaviour. Amanda mentioned how some children place the blame for everything that goes wrong in the class on a little girl who has Downes Syndrome. "They are so quick to say, 'Janice did it.'" During the sharing of these common experiences the teachers strongly related to each other's situations, but more importantly, they raised a number of questions: "Is this attitude just with native kids? Do we see prejudice with other nationalities or ethnic groups as well? Does a child have to be visibly different to be treated unfairly by other children? How do children develop certain attitudes? What can I do as a teacher to help?" These questions served as the basis for other discussions at other meetings and during conversations held as part of the interviews.

In these situations where the teachers made strong connections with each other's experiences it seemed as if the stories themselves served as a

catalyst or a shaping influence on the teachers' thinking. I saw this dimension as an important aspect in their moving toward critical awareness and pedagogical understanding.

THE RESEARCHER REFLECTS ON THE TEACHERS' STORIES IN LIGHT OF PRINCIPLES OF PEDAGOGY

In an attempt to understand the interrelationship between the teachers' storytelling experiences and the pedagogical insights they acquired, I have, up to this point, paid special attention to the way the teachers used language for learning; the way they incorporated certain literary features in the construction of their stories and the kind of meaning these storied accounts held for them.

Now, as researcher, like Valerie Polakow (1985), I am "confronted by the dual task of meaning making" (p. 832). I have reconstructed the teachers' oral narratives into written text and presented their interpretation of the meaning they formulated out of their experiential accounts. As participant and writer of this research, I too, have responded in a personal way to the teachers' stories and meanings. I have reflected on these narratives in an attempt to see them within the context of broader thematic meanings that in my mind, pose certain pedagogical concerns "for all of us to critically reflect upon" (Polakow 1985, p. 832).

I have organized these pedagogical concerns around the following themes: through children's eyes; the worlds of children; meeting expectations; celebrating children's learning; and self awareness. These themes emerged from the teachers' stories and meanings.

Through Children's Eyes

Many of the stories the teachers told pointed to the importance of our trying to see and understand a child's lived experience from his or her point of view. These particular stories revealed how the same situation can be experienced very differently by a child and by an adult. The story of Jeremy is a good example. Jeremy saw his participation in a spelling bee in light of the battle formation of the soldiers he had seen in film. He imagined himself standing in line, musket in hand, waiting his turn. Winning in both these situations was crucial. Seeing this event from a child's point of view told the teacher something of what this situation was like for Jeremy, and as a result, she was made aware of the need for sensitivity in planning games where winning was the main goal. There is also the story of James, who interpreted his teachers remarks about his concentration on Nintendo games, in a very different way than his teacher had intended. He did not see her remarks in the context of her worrying or caring about him. Rather, he saw them as a "putdown" of who he was as a person. Yet, we see a caring and responsible teacher who struggled with wanting to understand James' preoccupation or "obsession" with video games. Later on, however, his teacher was able to build a closer relationship of trust with James and to expand his interests and his learning. Bollnow (1989) speaks of trust in the adult-child relationship, especially involving a child's educators, "as necessary for his or her proper development" (p. 37). He says that it is our confidence and trust in children and their awareness of that confidence that will give them the support and encouragement to achieve.

Children express the meaning they give to their lived experiences in many ways. They tell their stories in the things they say, the way they move and act, and in the way they are. If we observe these things carefully, we may learn how a child sees and understands a situation, how he or she searches for meanings and clarity of happenings in their lives. The pedagogical question concerns how this child or that child experiences the things in the world, the things that influence his or her learning and growth as persons; things such as relationships, school subjects, environments, literature, and technology? What meaning does a child give to his curriculum?

I am reminded of the conversations I had a few years ago with Jason, a six year old child in my own classroom. My initial intent in talking with him was to get to know him better. But I found myself hearing Jason's voice telling me how he felt and what he thought about everyday things which ultimately helped me to see the world he lived in through his eyes. I saw how he perceived music classes: "I hate music at school anyway, it's not like you sing songs in the normal way. You have to learn them, say them over and over even if you already know them." I saw how he viewed the choice of books I read aloud: "If I were the teacher I would never read books that got everyone all excited and noisy. I would read calm, beautiful stories that made me feel quiet inside." I discovered that daycare was not somewhere he wanted to be early in the morning and after school: "Mostly I rest there and think about other things, but then when I get home I'm even too tired to play" (McConaghy, 1990, p. 13).

Those of us who are teachers hold an invitation to share many of the experiences and insights of the children we teach. Sadly, there are

teachers who hardly acknowledge such an invitation while others, like the teachers in this study, accept it as a privilege and a chance to gain a better understanding of how to be with children. The task is not always an easy one for sometimes it requires a kind of undoing of preconceived notions of the nature of this other person or happening. It requires trust.

Why bother? Is it really important, or even feasible, to expect to understand a child's point of view of his schooling and education, especially a child still in the early years of schooling? Even if it were possible with one child, would it not just reinforce the futility of trying to know, in the true sense, as many as 25 or 30 children?

The teachers in this group had an intuitive sense that it was not only important, but very possible to try to understand a child in this way. Their stories often revealed a strong interest in talking with children and listening to their ideas and feelings about matters at school and at home.

The observations the teachers made in their classrooms as part of this study, and the desire to tell each other stories of what they had seen or heard, provided them with support and encouragement to continue talking with children.

The Worlds of Children

In our desire to see the worlds of children with their understandings, and to get closer to them, we need to create for ourselves a deeper pedagogical consciousness of what those worlds are like. Maxine Greene (1986) says that as teachers and inquirers we have to "read the world as it

presents itself" to children (p. 783). For the worlds we have created for children of today are vastly different to the worlds we remember from our own past. To understand these differences is to know children within a broader cultural context that influences their attitudes toward subject matter and toward each other.

I refer to the term "worlds" rather than "world" because not all children are living under the same conditions, despite the fact that they may live in the same community or attend the same school. Neither is the lifeworld of an individual child consistently the same from one day to another. Many children are affected by separation, divorce or unemployment, which leads to a sudden move to another home, another school or another city. Teachers try to stay prepared, every day, to hear the voice of a child say, "Guess what teacher, I'm moving away tomorrow." The teacher sometimes worries and wonders "Will this child be alright?" Change and uncertainty have become the norm for so many children.

Within this study are concrete examples of the technological impact of television, computers, video games and other media in the lives of the children. Emma showed her concern with a child's obsession with video games. She felt frustrated as she tried to relate in some way to his experience. She had an implicit sense that children's minds and their thinking processes, right from infancy, are being shaped and developed in a way that has not happened for her or for other children at other times. What she was witnessing was a modern child who was being introduced not only to a new way or mode of learning but was being introduced to the possibilities of a different kind of knowledge at the end of it.

This knowledge, especially for children who watch television, includes a world of facts and information about almost any subject, along with entertainment that offers an explicit exposure to the "actualities of our lives" (Meek, 1991, p. 221). These actualities on television often involve scenes of sex, violence, injustice, and cruelty, interspersed with influential advertising, news, and a variety of family situation comedies. Some people worry that in all this vast milieu of visual images, children are exposed to concepts and experiences on television long before they are developmentally ready to understand them. Margaret Meek, however, while critically aware of this problem, reminds us that "television is usually social watching, especially in the home, where conversation goes on... with a lot of commentary" (1991, p. 216). As teachers, however, we need to be sensitive to situations where guidance is lacking and help children to deal with the world of popular culture.

For most children, these acts of violence and abuse are experienced vicariously, while others suffer the cruelty of many kinds of human injustices at the centre of their own lives. Such was the case of Linda, the child who, through her writing, was crying out for help. The teacher, following her administrator's advice, decided to keep this writing to herself rather than risk the possibility of it falling into the wrong hands and bringing further pain to Linda.

Another kind of injustice was played out in Paige's story of the unfair treatment of the native children during a class sharing time. As the other teachers listened "the horizons of telling and listening fused" (Polakow 1985, p. 829). They too remembered not only the racial inequalities but the injustices they knew existed with adults and children in their schools.

They told stories that involved people who are not part of an accepted social class and stories of children who suffer certain mental and physical disabilities.

For those of us who are concerned with not only teaching curriculum subject matter but feel a responsibility for children as the kind of persons they are and can become, knowing the worlds of children may enable us to protect and sustain them. But pedagogically speaking, we must go beyond awareness and take responsibility "to break from anchorage" when necessary and to "engage with children in a quest for what is possible" (Maxine Greene, 1986, p. 783).

I am mindful, too, of the inside world of children's own thoughts and feelings that they willingly enter through imaginative play or when they get lost in stories. When one child asks another "Are dragons real?", the answer may come in this way, "Dragons are like giants and witches, they aren't real, but they are just a fact of life." (McConaghy, 1990, p. 36). More and more studies are looking at children's responses to stories as a way of coming to know how children interpret the things in their worlds (Dombey, 1985; Fox, 1985; Hickman, 1981). But for teachers, knowing how children interpret their lived worlds is only beneficial, in a pedagogical way, if this knowledge is used to lead children to further understanding.

Meeting Expectations

The teachers often spoke about the diverse and differing expectations expressed to them by parents. They told stories of the parents who desperately worried about their children's progress in learning to read and

to write and how this worry was expressed in criticism of the teacher's methods and choice of materials. They expected the teachers to send work home even if the teacher felt it was not necessary or appropriate for a young child to continue doing school work in the evening.

Ashley described a different kind of expectation embedded within a comment by a father concerning his son's year in her kindergarten. "Maybe we should consider pulling him out of school because he doesn't like school. Actually he was doing way better last year in play school than with you." Obviously, this father had expected his child not only to enjoy school, but to show continuous progress from one year to the next. Ashley was devastated because she, too, hopes that every child will love school, will feel good about themselves and will grow in their learning. This situation raises the question of the continual need for improvement in coming to mutual understanding and better ways of negotiating meaning on the part of both the teacher and the parent.

Paige also spoke of a parent whose expectations of a partnership kind of relationship were clearly outlined during their conference time. "You know what this mother suggested? That I keep track of his behaviour at school and then the parents would punish him at home." For Paige, the idea of this arrangement came as somewhat of a shock and was, of course, out of the question.

Although these stories are varied in terms of the particular conflict they describe, they are also similar in many respects. They all involve teachers and parents who have certain expectations of each other simply because of where they stand in a relationship with a child. Some of the difficulties arise because each person sees his or her role and responsibility

in the child's education as being separated one from the other. Where literacy learning is concerned, for example, reading and writing are viewed by many parents as the sole responsibility of the school. Margaret Meek (1990) points out that "For most parents literacy is an entitlement which schools are expected to deliver" (p. 50). On the other hand teachers often feel unsupported by the home and want the parents to be an ally in this teaching and learning task. Sometimes, however, we hear more talk about "educating the parents" rather than learning and collaborating with them.

Concerned parents want their children to succeed in school. They want reassurance that they will be happy and confident, that they will become not only competent readers and writers as quickly as they can, but that they will also become caring and responsible people. In other words, they want what is good for their child. Similarly, of course teachers want these very same things for their students. Sometimes misunderstandings and conflicts arise when parents and teachers have extremely differing views of how these goals and expectations can be achieved. When this happens life can become very difficult for the teacher and the parents, and especially for the child.

Teachers need to be aware of some of the reasons behind these differences in order to mediate on behalf of children and on their own behalf. Emma touched on one of the most commonly held opinions regarding parents' and teachers' differing views when she said, "I think they are remembering their own school experiences and base what should be happening for their children on those memories." Denny Taylor (1983) in her research, carried out with many families found similar things. "The

experiences of the parents, the experiences of brothers and sisters, and the child's own experiences form a filter through which learning at school must pass" (p. 17). Because the nature of all of these experiences is so varied each and every "filtering system" is very different.

Woven within these variations we see the influence of culture, religion and particularly social-economic conditions. We also see differences characterized by the diverse modes and patterns of interaction in the home and in school. Katie illustrated this point when she told her story of parents coming into the classroom to write personal messages on a scroll for their children to read. She mentioned how the tone of one message stood out from the others. Where most of the parents had written very positive and encouraging words to their children one mother wrote, "I sure hope you improve this year and that you do better than you did last year." The teacher interpreted the sub text of this message as a negative threat, yet the child seemed unconcerned. As the teacher reflected on this experience she realized that "maybe this girl had some understanding of what her mother was about, after all it was her mother."

Perhaps we need to recognize that the likenesses and differences in the ways teachers and parents think about, and act toward, their children are closely tied to the ways in which they know them. Parents know their children from the day they are born and throughout their entire lives; they have responsibility for them around the clock, whereas, the teacher may know them for only parts of a day, and for one or more years while they are in school. Yet, a child's learning and growing, in ways that develop the human qualities we all desire, is the responsibility of both parents and teachers. Van Manen (1991) says that "they [teachers] are constantly being

reminded to be mindful of their status in *loco parentis* " (p. 5). Knowing this in a pedagogical sense implies an ongoing effort for parents and teachers to understand and to learn from one another.

Celebrating Children's Learning

The word "celebrate" is described in the Oxford English Dictionary as honouring someone or something for its excellence and to preserve and keep safe. The teachers honoured their children's learning and preserved it by telling each other about what they called "the little things" they had noticed children doing during the course of a day in the classroom.

In their story narratives they described children learning about learning by drawing on each other's experience and trying out new ideas as they questioned and communicated their points of view. Emma spoke of her eight-year olds as "democratically working things out" in their class meetings. Paige shared her experience of observing children learning to read by reading the environmental print in her room. Helen was fascinated with the way the children wanted to figure out all the little details of print inside the jacket of a book and how they discovered that this print has a different purpose than story text itself. She described too, how her students were seeing subtle patterns in books and then using these patterns in their own writing. She realizes that children see many things that adults may not notice. Ton Beekman (1983) says that "conventional meanings hinder what we see, whereas, the childs landscape is more immediate, more exciting — full of colours and change which I, as an adult don't notice" (p. 40).

Amanda reflected with growing amazement on a day when she watched her six-year olds use their concentration and creative powers to imaginatively transform a variety of odd materials she had on hand into their own representations of buildings and statues. She sensed an atmosphere of joy and freedom coming into the room. She reminded the others of the connection between this event and Robert Alexander's (1984) ideas about what children are doing when they create. "In the act of creation, children are closer to their truth than any other time. They can fully express their humanistic feelings of caring deeply about other people, about nature, about animals, about life" (p. 479). Similarly, Paulo Freire (1985) speaks of the need for children to engage in spontaneous and creative endeavours. "In the last analysis, the kids should come full of spontaneity — with their feelings, with their questions, with their creativity, with their risk to create, getting their own words "into their own hands" in order to do beautiful things with them." (p. 19).

One of the teachers, however, apologetically referred to the kind of narratives that were told to celebrate children's learning as "bragging stories". In some ways, this idea is not too surprising when we think about the nature of stories most often told in staffrooms. Staffroom stories are more apt to be filled with incidents of children's difficult behaviour and inadequacies, or filled with the teacher's frustrations with the many demands placed on them. While venting such feelings is necessary and to be expected, stories that continually express a negative side of teaching can overshadow other more positive comments about the things that are happening. In other words, we can become conditioned not to hear or tell stories of children's successes.

I wonder, too, if the teachers' hesitation to dwell on the positive aspects rather than on the negative side of teaching and learning comes out of the notion that it is the teacher who is entirely responsible for all learning that happens, or does not happen, at school. This attitude usually reflects the belief that teachers instruct and transmit knowledge to children, rather than the belief that children construct and own their own knowledge.

In order to celebrate children's learning by sharing it with others we first need to be able to recognize it when it happens. Sometimes the tendency is to wait for the test results, those pencil and paper measurements we traditionally consider so important. For young children these forms of testing are usually not only unnecessary but inappropriate. They tell us what children have done, and usually out of context, rather than what they are doing, how they are going about making sense of things to make meaning.

I believe the teachers in this study celebrated their students' accomplishments and wanted to preserve these memories of learning in order to recreate them in new settings with other children. Through so many of their story narratives, they were bringing their own thoughts into words to express an understanding of the notion put forth by Vygostky (1978) that, "what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (p. 87).

Self Awareness

When each teacher told her story of a classroom incident she was inviting the other teachers to share, not only an event in the classroom, but to enter into what Sandra Stahl (1983) calls "a welcome gift to a cold world, a moment by the fire of self" (p. 274). While the teachers' storytelling provided the concrete means for reflection on the pedagogical situations involving children, it also provided a means for self-reflection for the teacher as person. The whole experience allowed them to bring into the open their actions, to think about them, and to see anew their beliefs and values that identify the kind of teacher they are. Talking with each other about their beliefs and actions revealed many of the basic qualities that they felt were important for teachers of children.

These qualities included patience, being responsible for guiding a child, being accepting of, and understanding of a child's needs, being a learner along with the children they taught and striving to be tactful and thoughtful. Bollnow (1989) describes patience as "the basic virtue of the educator" but he also reminds us that it is sometimes very difficult to be patient when "the child does not show a real interest in doing work" (p. 50). Then, according to Bollnow, some impatience is acceptable, especially in situations that involve routine tasks. This was the case with Ashley who told us about the incident involving the little boy who was taking a long time to complete his card for the guessing game. She shared with the other teachers her feelings of impatience with this child. She asked herself "Just how patient a person am I?" She wondered if she was generally patient enough and she was unsure about knowing when a teacher needed to be patient and when not. It is difficult, especially for beginning teachers to

know the kind of situations that in a pedagogical sense demand patience and those that do not.

Through Emma's narrative account of her experience of being a cooperating teacher she became more openly aware of her need to be needed by her students. Her deep sense of responsibility for guiding a child in a particular direction was expressed in the thematic meaning she gave to one of her own stories.

Even in the other stories that did not question or make revelation of self explicit, the telling and listening to narrative accounts of what they were already doing acted as a means of reflecting and contemplating about themselves and what they believed. Their choice of which story to tell, how they told it, and what they said about it, all reflected the things they considered important. For example, their stories revealed, in different ways, how they believed in their students ability to create meaning, how they saw their own role as enabler of students' learning, and how they strived to be in Douglas Barnes' (1985) sense, an "interpretive teacher."

Their stories also revealed how strongly they identified themselves by the way others saw them. Ashley momentarily saw herself as a "loser" when she interpreted a parent's remarks as a criticism of her entire program. She then saw herself doing the wrong thing in giving patterned writing to children after she read someone else's opinions, which were against it. There were other examples such as Helen's sense of failure when her best student didn't want to write, and Katie's sense of lack of power or hope for an abused child. There were many other stories of children learning together through discovery and interaction, taking risks, conducting their own class meetings, engaging in conversations one-to-one

with their teachers and parents, and generally being actively involved in decisions concerning their own learning.

Underlying the stories of all the teachers was a search for the knowledge that they were doing the right thing, that they were carrying out in practice what they knew, in a tacit way, was good teaching. Their stories revealed a desire not only to know about themselves and how they were objectively viewed by others, but to know themselves more clearly in order to know how to act in a pedagogical way with children. Stories that exemplified seeing themselves through other people's eyes carried with them the sensitivity and vulnerability that goes along with caring about what others think. Like Michael Novak (1978), we saw how the "objective portrait out there can be shattered, so easily shattered" (p. 44).

The teachers' stories clearly indicate they are still learning, still wanting to grow as meaning makers of their own experiences. Through their storytelling and narrative conversations they were not only expressing who they are now, but they were opening a world of new possibilities, of new stories they can learn to tell.

At the end of the research year, the teachers who participated in this study decided to continue to meet on a regular basis. They agreed to keep on raising and exploring issues and questions revolving around their lives with children. By entering into the telling and listening of new stories, and by the retelling of others, they will, I believe, continue to strive toward self understanding and the understanding of children.

CHAPTER 8

STORY BEGINNINGS AND STORY ENDINGS

> Neither the teacher nor the children can change without the production of new discourses in which to read their actions and to produce different actions and different subjectivities.
>
> Valerie Walkerdine, 1982, p. 38.

This study, centred on the role of story and narrative in teachers' lives, opens up a new kind of discourse for learning within the realm of teachers' professional development. It concentrates on the important function that narrative serves as a pervasive and fundamental means of understanding experience. This view of narrative is something of a departure from the traditional role that narrative usually plays in research studies. This departure leads toward new possibilities for narrative discourse in other areas of education. It suggests that we need to look at how narrative is generally used in classroom collaborative research, in teacher education and in classrooms of children in schools.

Contrasting Differences in Research Procedures

One of the purposes of this study was to explore an aspect of teacher development that is usually de-emphasized within the conventional forms

of inservice education. It was to see if a small group of teachers could learn and acquire deeper insights into their own teaching within the context of their active participation and reflection on stories of personal experiences. Apart from the professional development aspect of this study, it also presents an alternative research procedure than that which is traditionally found even within the realm of narrative inquiry. These are some of the differences.

First, there is the way in which this study originated. It began with a request from a small group of practicing teachers to certain consultants in their own school district. These teachers were searching for a valid way to continue their professional growth by acquiring a deeper knowledge of children and pedagogy. They saw themselves as learners and inquirers. This desire for learning on the part of teachers was the major impetus in beginning this research study. In this sense, the participants were self selected.

My second point of difference is a personal one. It involved for me a shift in focus from my personal experience as a teacher researcher in my own classroom to a teacher educator in collaboration with other teachers. In this research study we were all researchers and learners. The teachers were researching their own teaching practice while I was researching the process involved in this experience and the outcomes of it. As a researcher I wanted to build on my past experiences of action research and narrative as a way of knowing, and to assist other teachers to learn in this way.

In this present study, I was not directly involved with the children portrayed in these teachers' stories. Yet, I felt I knew them. Along with each teacher I wanted what was "good" for them. Like Polakow (1985), I

also felt a responsibility as a researcher to go beyond the microworld of each teacher and to consider the pedagogical questions that these storied situations suggested to me. As Gardner (1984) writes in discussing ways of thinking more broadly about education, "We should be painting a vastly greater mural on a vastly more spacious wall" (p. 128).

Finally, another difference embedded within this research study is concerned with the approach to method. This study employed a method of narrative inquiry which drew on teachers' lived experiences in the form of telling and listening to each others' stories. As mentioned earlier, stories as a source of data for researchers to learn about the lifeworlds of teachers are, of course, not unusual. Research carried out in many disciplines other than education rely on hearing and reconstructing other peoples' narratives. What I put forth as a major difference in this study is that story and narrative, in this case, are considered not only as substance or content, but as a learning process and a major way of making meaning in our lives. This is true for the teller of tales as well as for the listener.

How Do Teachers' Stories Provide Pedagogical Insights?

The teachers in this research study selected incidents from their daily teaching and then took the opportunity provided by their school district to come together with their colleagues to deliberately share these incidents in conversation. For them, this undertaking involved a great deal of their own time and a willingness to take risks and to trust each other with confidences which were not always easy and comfortable. It often meant becoming vulnerable by exposing a side of oneself to the other teachers

present. Yet, because the social and interactive context for these meetings was so informal, so intimate and so accepting, the teachers trusted each other enough to take the necessary risks to question and to explore their practice.

Teachers meeting together in this way, however, will not automatically lead to the exploration of deeper understandings or to the acquisition of new pedagogical insights. I believe that the teachers who would benefit most from this kind of alternative approach to professional development must be those who are willing to learn from their students as well as from their colleagues. Most importantly, they need to be teachers who have a strong desire to engage in thoughtful reflection and open dialogue. Even when these qualities are present, not all teachers wish to, or are able to organize and conduct a meeting of this kind. Therefore, it may be essential to find a willing facilitator who will encourage and enable the teachers to unleash their narrative competence and to discover their own learning through the power of story, reflection and interaction.

The insights the teachers in this study acquired came about through the telling and listening to the many stories of events going on both within their classrooms and outside. Although all these insights related in some way to teaching, they were not all pedagogical in the sense that I have attempted to use the term "pedagogy" in this study. In other words, some of the insights the teachers acquired centered on new ideas and techniques for using resources, for organizing instruction and for implementing curriculum. The insights I considered more pedagogical in nature indicated a conscientious and a strong sense of caring about their relationships and responsibilities to children. Underlying these

pedagogical insights was a normative dimension. The teachers were continually searching for ways of knowing what was appropriate and morally right for the children they taught. They were concerned with meeting their own expectations of what they thought a "good teacher" would do, even in conflicting and difficult situations. They wanted to avoid any practices that would, in any way, inhibit for a child "the disposition to learn" (Katz & Chard, 1989, p. 30). All of the insights the teachers acquired, however, are practical ones. They are practical in the sense that they helped teachers to know what to do and how to act with children in the classroom.

The pedagogical insights were revealed mainly through the teachers' coming to know more about their own beliefs that undergird their actions. In many cases they reached a heightened awareness of why they felt strongly about certain issues or practices going on in their classrooms. They made their implicit theories explicit. Thus, they were better able to evaluate what they were doing and to make practical choices to either continue doing the things they were already doing, or to make appropriate adjustments.

Through the narrative mode of thought and a heightened awareness of their own beliefs, perspectives, and values the teachers also gained a stronger sense of themselves and others as teachers and as human beings. They saw their own growth mirrored in the stories they shared.

The insights or the understandings, I believe, were not necessarily lying dormant within the the events recounted or in the stories themselves, simply waiting to be taken out by the teller or the listener. In many instances, however, the roots of understanding were already there, but the

knowing was not yet shaped or made coherent to the knower. This tacit knowing was made accessible through engagement in the narrative act of telling and listening to stories. In this way, the stories acted as a catalyst for the teachers to create their own meaning out of experience.

The teachers' meaning was manifested mainly through the power of dialogue and through reflection in the form of response to the stories. While the stories undoubtedly provided them with a concrete means for this dialogue and reflection, it was the teachers' active and personal participation in the telling, in the listening, in the conversations and in the critical thinking about all the narratives that generated the new understandings and insights.

Narrative and Teacher Education

How does this research apply to those of us who are concerned with the continuing education and transformative experiences of teachers?

The insights discovered by the teachers in their storytelling experiences leads us all to an expanded notion of story beyond the limits of learning through the literary discourse of fiction. It moves into the realm of teachers' personal experience and conversational stories of their own making. Through these narrative exchanges we see how stories are not "autonomous islands, becalmed in books" but that "we are always in a high state of readiness to transform into story not only what we experience directly but also what we hear and read" (Rosen, 1985, p. 12).

This study points to the worlds of other adult learners, the students in university classrooms and experienced teachers in inservice settings. The study suggests that within both these kinds of communities teachers and student teachers could learn through story and other forms of narrative discourse, if they have the opportunity to take stories seriously. This means that the stories presented to them must be presented by teacher educators who themselves believe that narrative and story are valid means of thinking, knowing and learning. It means moving away from the sole use of the more traditional discourse of argument and essay to include a wide range of narrative, story, autobiography, poetry and anecdotes of personal experiences that emerge in the midst of class discussion.

Unfortunately, this stance toward narrative in teachers' professional learning is rare. Within our educational structures the narrative mode is often viewed as the "poor relation" to the more expository, factual, well formed arguments of abstraction (Bruner 1986, Rosen 1985, Stahl 1983).

The attitude toward story is slowly changing, however, but there is much work to be done in this area before we accept the world of story and narrative as more than a simplistic methodology that is either too personal, or too lacking in rigour to be considered a serious or valid mode of learning.

As teacher educators we need to examine closely the two worlds that Bruner (1986) describes as the "logico-scientific and the narrative world of story" (p. 11) and to see both these worlds as different but not mutually exclusive. Rather, we need to see them anew as complementary and equally important ways of understanding. If we thoughtfully consider all modes of thought and language and how they act as different ways of

learning and different forms of knowledge, eventually we may come to a clearer understanding of both the cognitive and aesthetic stance toward learning. It is only then that as teachers and educators of teachers we can begin to enable language for learning in all subjects and for all ages.

The Need for Change Continues

This study strongly suggests that a serious attempt needs to be made to change some of the images of teachers' learning discovered by Goodlad, (1990); Lampert and Clark, (1990); and Sarason (1990). In their examination of schools of education they saw an overabundance of the traditional lecture approach even for subjects such as cooperative learning and inquiry methods. Goodlad cites examples of poor models of teaching such as the continuous dispensing of information in lecture format. These examples were repeatedly reported by education students across North America. Lampert and Clark (1990) express similar concerns as they caution teacher educators against thinking that expert teacher knowledge gained from experienced teachers in the field can be distilled in some significant way and then given to student teachers as something that will serve them in practice.

Enabling the Reflective Practitioner

Today, both student teachers and practicing teachers are hearing more and more about the importance of becoming reflective in their teaching. Often, they are encouraged to keep journals in which they write

about their experiences in the classroom as a way of standing back and thinking about what they are doing and what they believe. In many cases, student teachers are meeting in seminars with their faculty consultants during the practicum in order to foster this kind of reflection-on-action by sharing their ideas and stories with each other. What is the nature of the stories these students tell, reflect on, and ultimately learn from? What kinds of stories have these student teachers been told by their professors, seminar leaders or cooperating teachers? For many of the stories we tell and learn to tell are shaped and influenced by the stories we have heard from others.

While stories concerning management of lessons or organizational practices are, of course, important, we need to be mindful that these subjects will not foster the kind of reflection we usually associate with the notion of reflective practitioner. If, during discussion times, the stories that are told revolve around instrumental concerns or technical aspects of curriculum rather than on pedagogical matters, the kind of reflection that is developed may be considered disappointing by those who are wanting to help teachers develop a sense of reflective awareness. The kind of information-matching that will come out of the discussion concerning these instrumental matters will be a different form of knowledge. It will likely develop an understanding of the technical side of teaching more than the art of knowing and being with children in the role of pedagogue.

Teachers need encouragement to focus their attention on children and to hear and reflect on the stories that they tell. We need to think in terms of the worlds of a child, to engage in a conversation with one child and tell this child's story of how a particular place or experience in the

classroom seemed to him or to her. We need to talk about what this means for us as adults living with these children in classrooms. These are the kinds of stories that, in this study, captured the attention of the teller and the listener, and moved the teachers to dialogue and reflection.

Narrative in the Classroom

It is easy to understand why Harold Rosen laments the general lack of opportunities for children in school to use story and narrative for discovery learning. "The further up the school system we go the less likely is it that spontaneous, pupil-made narrative will be able to insert itself comfortably and naturally into the flow of talk" (1985, p. 18).

Unfortunately, my experiences of seeing many classrooms makes me realize that his concern is still a very real one. What we have learned as language arts educators and what this study has shown about the power of narrative as a means of shaping our reality, has not become an integral part of learning in most classrooms. We have yet to help many teachers understand that the key to language and literacy, especially for young children, is story and narrative, or that the way into literacy is by reading stories, discussing them, and writing them. In other words we need to learn more about the meaning of narrative as knowing. We need to help teachers live this knowledge with children in a practical way everyday.

Engagement with narrative can go beyond the reading, talking about and crafting of stories. There are many other classroom contexts in which teachers can foster children's narrative competency. They can encourage children to retell fictional and personal stories, to engage in dramatic play,

to be involved in projects of cooperative learning activities, and most importantly, to express themselves in their own social and cultural language.

Although there are many classrooms where we do not see these things happening on a daily basis, gradually, we are aware of more and more teachers who are bringing children's narrative experiences alive as meaning making events. These are usually the innovative teacher learners who are following current research in language education and who are seriously making it work in practice.

In Conclusion

Our challenging venture together over the past year has helped all the participants to learn about the strengths and the difficulties involved in action research and collaborative learning. Together we discovered and understood more clearly our commonalities and our differences as teachers.

Through our stories and conversations we examined and reflected on questions of meaning. These questions revolved around pedagogical issues such as, "What is right or appropriate for children?" "What is right for us as teachers in the way we think and act?" "How we can be more thoughtful and critical within a political system where we are both agent and critic?" We soon realized that these kinds of questions seldom came with solutions or immediate and ready made answers. But we did discover how a group of determined teachers can deliberately come together to share ideas and stories and to strive toward a deeper understanding of the meaning of

everyday incidents that develop in our relationships with children, parents, and colleagues.

Throughout this process, the teachers discovered their own voices and began to feel more confident about themselves as professionals by understanding more clearly what they already knew. Moreover, they came to know their personal and practical knowledge as not only inseparable from their beliefs, but as a kind of knowledge that was highly valued by others. Most importantly, the teachers grew in their understanding of the meaning of pedagogy and learned that building a pedagogy is a continuous and developing process of learning and discovery.

At the beginning of the research experience I believed that a start toward all of these things was possible. Now, in retrospect, I see how far one small group of six determined teachers has come along the teacher-learner pathway toward this end.

Finally, the teachers in this study have demonstrated well the interrelated notion of narrative, story and knowing. Through their storytelling experiences they have shown us how conversational stories of teaching can provide pedagogical insights. But they have also shown that stories can provide insights only to those who allow the power of story to work in a personal way.

The teachers began with the suggestion Polakow offered that, "stories are where we must begin." This was a natural place to start because whenever the teachers came together they were filled with stories of children, classroom life and teaching. What they needed was a comfortable place to tell them, and colleagues who were listeners and who were willing

to join into a narrative exchange in such a way that would allow them to become meaning makers of their own experiences.

The teachers' stories did not stop with the telling. They went on storying and restorying as they responded to their oral narratives transcribed into written text, while I, as scribe, interpreter and writer of these oral accounts, created my own interlocking sets of meaning. Thus stories begat other stories. And this, for all of us, is what makes stories so compelling and so powerfully rich.

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning...
> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
>
> T. S. Eliot
>
> Little Gidding

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APPENDIX 1

TEACHER PERMISSION LETTER

TO TEACHER PARTICIPANTS: A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION

As a consultant and graduate student at the University of Alberta I am exploring the nature of teachers' stories of teaching and their developing pedagogy. This research study will take place within the context of the teacher researcher group to which you belong. The data gathered by me will serve as the basis of a written dissertation and will act as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

This letter is a request for your permission to allow me to record our conversations, transcribe audio tapes, read and respond to dialogue journals and other writings, visit your classrooms and to use any data collected at the teacher researcher meetings or other interview sessions, as the basis of my research study.

I _____ grant June McConaghy permission for the above request.

Date: _____

Signature of person requesting permission.

_____

Date: _____